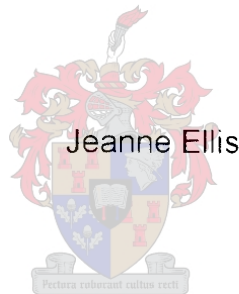


**PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES OF CONTROL AND FEMALE HOMOSOCIAL
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË**

by



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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety, or in any part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

ABSTRACT

In Charlotte Brontë's novels, the importance accorded to female homosocial relationships – such as friendship and the mother-daughter relationship – challenges the conventional structure of the Victorian realist novel, in which the focus of the female protagonist's development is almost exclusively on the eventual achievement of heterosexual marriage. Structurally, heterosexual marriage at closure re-establishes the status quo that has been threatened or destabilised during the unfolding of the plot. Yet, what Brontë's novels reveal, is that the status quo thus re-established also confirms patriarchy as a system in which the bonds between men are consolidated to maintain social, political and economic power as a male prerogative. By contrast, the ideology that promotes marriage as the *sine qua non* of women's existence positions women as rivals and the representation of female homosocial relationships in the nineteenth-century novel is either relegated to the margins of the text or erased entirely. In Brontë's novels, the structural relationship between this conventional displacement of female homosocial relationships and the silencing and containment of female desire in heterosexual marriage at closure is consistently explored and subverted.

In an increasingly complex process of rewriting the Victorian novel from a female perspective, Brontë's novels construct alternative plots that privilege the representation of female homosocial relationships even as they imitate conventional plot structure. In so doing, the gendering of narrative voice as female lays claim to a female discourse of desire, which is rooted in female homosociality and inclusive of lesbian desire. Compulsory (female) heterosexuality, which is exclusively domestic and maternal, is therefore challenged by an alternative representation of female desire as defiant of the rigid categories imposed by heterosexuality, because it is fluid and multiple in its expression.

This thesis explores the process of recuperation through which Brontë both places the representation of female homosocial relationships at the centre of her novels and reveals patriarchal structures of control at work.

ABSTRAK

In die romans van Charlotte Brontë konfronteer the sentraliteit van vroulike homososiale verhoudings – soos vriendskap en die moeder-dogter verhouding – die konvensionele struktuur van die Victoriaanse realistiese roman. Volgens hierdie konvensionele struktuur is die fokus van die vroulike protagonis se ontwikkeling bykans uitsluitlik gerig op haar uiteindelijke toetrede tot 'n heteroseksuele huwelik. Struktureel gesproke herstel die heteroseksuele huwelik by die sluiting van die roman die status quo wat bedreig of gedestabiliseer is gedurende die ontplooiing van die roman. Wat Brontë se romans egter aan die lig bring, is dat die status quo wat só herstel word, ook die patriargale sisteem bevestig – waarbinne die bande tussen mans gekonsolideer word ten einde sosiale, politieke en ekonomiese mag as 'n manlike prerogatief te waarborg. Die ideologie wat die huwelik voorhou as die sine qua non van die vrou se bestaan posisioneer vroue as mededingers, en hierdeur word die uitbeelding van vroulike homososiale verhoudings in die negentiende-eeuse roman verskuif na die buitewyke van die teks, of word dit algeheel uitgewis. In Brontë se romans word die strukturele verwantskap tussen hierdie konvensionele verplasing van vroulike homososiale verhoudings en die demping of beheer van vroulike begeerte in die heteroseksuele huwelik voortdurend in die roman se sluiting ondersoek en ondermyn.

In 'n proses wat 'n toenemend ingewikkelde herskrywing van die Victoriaanse roman vanuit 'n vroulike gesigspunt inhou, stel Brontë se romans alternatiewe verwickelingsplanne saam wat voorrang gee aan die uitbeelding van vroulike homososiale verhoudings, terwyl hierdie storieplanne konvensionele struktuurplanne naboots. Die manier waarop die verteller se stem só vervroulik word gee uiting aan 'n vroulike diskoers van begeerte wat gewortel is in vroulike homososialiteit en wat lesbiese begeerte insluit. Verpligte (vroulike) heteroseksualiteit, wat uitsluitlik huislik en moederlik is, word dus gekonfronteer deur 'n alternatiewe uitbeelding van vroulike begeerte wat die rigiede kategorieë opgelê deur heteroseksualiteit verwerp, en meer vloeibare en veelsoortige vorme van uitdrukking daarstel.

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die herstellingsproses waardeur Brontë die uitbeelding van vroulike homososiale verhoudings sentraal plaas in haar

romans, terwyl sy terselfdertyd die werkswyses van patriargale beheerstrukture aan die lig bring.

This thesis is for my daughter Raine.

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Introduction

Between women: (Re)Figuring the triangle.

For woman is traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men. Merchandise, then. This makes her the guardian of matter whose price will be determined by 'subjects': workers, tradesmen, consumers, according to the standard of their work and their need-desire. Women are marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers. This stamp(ing) determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything more than the scene of more or less rival exchange between two men, even when they are competing for the possession of mother-earth.

How can this object of transaction assert a right to pleasure without extricating itself from the established commercial system? How can this merchandise relate to other goods on the market other than with aggressive jealousy?

Luce Irigaray – "This sex which is not one"

But what if the 'goods' refused to go to market? What if they maintained among themselves 'another' kind of trade?

Luce Irigaray – "When the goods get together"

★

In a letter to her friend Jane Humphrey, Emily Dickinson describes the threat of marriage posed by Jane's numerous suitors as a battle in which women are victorious only for as long as they remain conscious of their environment as hostile territory: "How many knights are slain and wounded, and how many now remain? Keep a list of the conquests, Jennie, this is an *enemy's* Land!" (quoted in Erkkila 1992: 19, emphasis in original) For Dickinson, a conquest is not a husband secured, but one resisted, because it thus achieves a freedom from marriage and ensures the continuation of the much-preferred bonds with women friends. Near the end of her life, she turns down a marriage proposal with a letter in which she says: "Don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to Language?" (49). Implicit in this refusal of marriage is a criticism of the "yes" with which women consent to their domestication by participating in the symbolic structures of patriarchy that contain and silence them. Dickinson, in her letters to women friends and in her poems, constructs an opposing symbolic in which the presence of men is consistently represented as intrusive and destructive of the relationships between women. Anticipating the potential

disruption of their passionate and erotically charged relationship, Dickinson, for instance, writes a letter to Susan Gilbert (who eventually married Dickinson's brother) in which her anxiety about marriage is apparent:

How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gathers pearls every evening; but to the *wife*, Susie, sometimes the *wife forgotten*, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world; you have seen flowers at morning, *satisfied* with the dew, and those same sweet flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun. . . . they know that the man of noon, is *mightier* than the morning and their life is henceforth to him. Oh, Susie, it is dangerous. . . . It does so rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. (34, emphasis in original)

A similar view of patriarchy as fundamentally destructive of female identity and desire, specifically as it is enforced through heterosexual marriage, informs Charlotte Brontë's novels. Like Dickinson, Brontë associates heterosexual marriage with the silencing and containment of female desire, and attempts to find, or create, a language with which to articulate desire that is seen as inherently transgressive. Dickinson, in her poems and letters to women, relies on a more and more cryptic encoding of female desire as lesbian by using a "multiple, fluid, and mobile language [that] contests masculine logic and masculine orders of power" (Erkkila 1992: 42). Even though this expression of desire remains essentially private, it is seen as so dangerous that it requires disguise and subterfuge. When female desire is articulated in the public arena of the nineteenth-century novel, the need for strategies of concealment becomes even more pronounced, especially if the writer is a woman. In Brontë's novels, the negotiation of narrative voice can be seen to represent an attempt to articulate female desire as other than merely singular and confinable within the rigid plot of heterosexual marriage that defines Victorian realism. This coincides, for Brontë, with the re-inscription of female homosocial relationships as integral to the construction and representation of

female desire. Brontë's dual project represents a subversive challenge to nineteenth-century gender construction and ideology and the literary conventions that reinforce them. The title of my thesis, "Patriarchal structures of control and female homosocial relationships in the novels of Charlotte Brontë", intends to signal Brontë's preoccupation with the relationship between the fictional representation of women's bonds with other women and the construction of female desire as legitimate only when in service to heterosexual marriage. The representation of women's homosocial relationships as significant constitutes a challenge to what Adrienne Rich describes as "obligatory heterosexuality" (1979: 190) and "the institution of heterosexuality" (quoted in Sedgwick 1985: 3).

In the same way that nineteenth-century society therefore represents, for women, "an *enemy's* Land", the male-dominated publishing world and the literary conventions that inscribe the authority of the male voice, represent, for the woman writer, hostile territory that demands cunning strategies for survival. One strategy Brontë uses is to imitate or mimic the structural and narrative conventions of the realist novel, only to draw attention to its ideological underpinnings and the silencing and containment of women upon which it is premised. This "strategy of mimicry or mimesis" (Whitford 1991: 70) is similar to the one theorised by Luce Irigaray when she writes that:

One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to locate the place of exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible', of 'matter' – to 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: recovering a possible operation of the feminine in language. (Quoted in Whitford 1991:71)

Since Brontë, like Irigaray, recognises that "one cannot simply step outside phallogocentrism, simply reverse the symbolism" (Whitford 1991: 70), she

devises a mimetic strategy that is also, as Whitford suggests about Irigaray's theory, intended to "protect [herself] against (re)assimilation and destruction by the masculine economy" (72). Whitford, for instance, points out that one of the terms Irigaray uses, *mimétisme*, means "camouflage" or "protective clothing" (72). This deliberate assumption of the mimetic strategy enables Brontë to implement a "process of interpretive rereading" (Irigaray quoted in Whitford: 72) of the realist novel similar to that which Irigaray implements when "offering interpretations" (Whitford: 72) of philosophical or metaphysical discourse. Irigaray explains this process as follows:

The process of interpretive rereading has always been a *psychoanalytic undertaking* as well. That is why we need to pay attention to the way the unconscious works in each philosophy, and perhaps in philosophy in general. We need to listen (psycho)analytically to its procedures of repression, to the structuration of language that shores up its representations, separating the true from the false, the meaningful from the meaningless, and so forth. (Quoted in Whitford: 72, emphasis in original)

Brontë's astute analysis of Victorian gender politics at the level of plot structure and narrative voice is already apparent in her "first attempt" (Brontë 1980: xi) to create for herself a public voice that disguises her identity as a woman. This results in the creation of a male first-person narrator, Crimsworth, whose voice, that of the universal subject, is allowed to dominate the autobiographical text. The authority of this voice is emphasised by the title of the narrative, *The Professor*, which inscribes both the autobiographer's authority as pedagogue and his use of the discourse of instruction. This strategy, however, also subversively foregrounds the paradox inherent in the traditional (male-narrated/authored) realist plot. Although it is driven towards closure in marriage by a mandatory heterosexuality, it at the same time constructs and maintains narrative desire as masculine and "*hom(m)osexual*", as Luce Irigaray defines the "culture in which men exchange goods and women" (Whitford 1991: 44). Brontë's focus in this novel on what Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “male homosocial desire” (1985: 1) provides a useful platform from which to briefly explore theories of triangulation that, several critics suggest, underpin representations of desire in the realist novel. My discussion of these theories is consistently informed by my reading of Luce Irigaray whose presence is, as the epigraphs to this chapter indicate, central both to this chapter and to my thesis as a whole.

The fictional autobiography is introduced by a letter Crimsworth writes to “an old school acquaintance” (Brontë 1980: 1) which, when unanswered, becomes the impetus to transfer the narrative from the “private” (8) sphere of one reader to that of “the public at large” as a memoir. Apart from introducing the narrative proper, the letter establishes “public” readership as male in that the recipient of the letter is male. The text thus imitates the conventional structure of the novel as a discourse between men that appears to privilege the plot of heterosexual marriage and yet simultaneously represents the homosocial relationships between men (Crimsworth and Hunsden) as more complex and interesting. In contrast, the relationship between women (Frances and Zoraïde) is predictably represented as based on rivalry and “jealous[y]” (237). On the last page of the novel Hunsden, still very much a part of the *ménage*, refers to Zoraïde as Crimsworth’s “first flame” and tells Frances not to be “jealous” (237), thus conclusively inscribing the rivalry that is assumed when marriage is situated as the only legitimate (pre)occupation for women.¹

The relationship between Crimsworth and Hunsden illustrates Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s argument, in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, that the “pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality” (1985: 1) exists in a symbiotic relationship with “the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). Hunsden, for instance, facilitates Crimsworth’s “newly regained liberty” (Brontë 1980: 41) from his brother’s tyranny and, by providing Crimsworth with “a letter of introduction” (44), ensures his future employment in Belgium. In Brontë’s text, homosocial desire is also clearly sexualised because

an implicit homoeroticism informs scenes of intimacy between Crimsworth and Hunsden. Hunsden, in fact, resembles other highly eroticised male figures in Brontë's fiction, such as Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and M. Paul in *Villette*. Like them, he also smokes cigars. Jane, for instance, smells "Mr Rochester's cigar" (Brontë 1987a: 250) in the garden at Thornfield before she actually sees him, and Lucy Snowe knows that "the hand of M. Paul was on intimate terms with [her] desk" because the "treasures" left in her desk "*smelt of cigars*" (Brontë 1987b: 431, emphasis in original). Crimsworth also becomes aware of Hunsden's presence in his garden because he "smel[ls] the fragrance, and s[ees] the red spark of a cigar" (Brontë 1980: 25).

The focus here is precisely on the play of homosexual desire that Luce Irigaray suggests with her pun, "*hom(m)o-sexualite*", which, as Karen Newman explains, "encompasses an entire range of male relations from the homoerotic to the competitive to the commercial" (1988: 21).² Sedgwick's indebtedness to Irigaray is obvious, but, unlike Irigaray whose concern is with female genealogy and the disruption of male homosocial structures that oppress women, Sedgwick's concern is with an analysis of the representation of male homosocial desire in male-authored texts. Terry Castle, for instance, points out that Sedgwick, even when she does begin to explore the subject of lesbianism and lesbian authors, still privileges, as she does when discussing Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, "that gorgeous homosocial romance of two men on a mesa in New Mexico" (Sedgwick quoted in Castle 1997: 550n). Castle argues that, for Sedgwick:

Lesbian authors, it seems, are valuable here exactly to the extent that they are able to imagine and represent – what else? – male homosocial bonding. Thus the elevation of Cather, Yourcenar, Compton-Burnett, and Renault (significant choices all) to an all-new lesbian pantheon: of lesbians who enjoy writing about male-male eros, triangulated or otherwise, more than its female equivalent. What is missing here is any room for the lesbian writer who *doesn't* choose to celebrate men's 'gorgeous homosocial romances' – for whom indeed such romances are anathema, precisely because they get in the way, so damagingly.

of women's homosocial romances. (Castle 1997: 550n, emphasis in original)

Sedgwick's analysis of male homosocial desire is based on René Girard's "schematisation of the folk-wisdom of erotic triangles" (Sedgwick 1985: 21). The Girardian triangle, though flawed in its disregard of gender and power differences, constructs a paradigm of "mediated desire" (Girard 1965: 2) to describe the disruption of the straight line of desire, joining male subject and female object, by "a third presence [male], radiating towards both subject and object" (2). The result, as Sedgwick suggests, is that "the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (1985: 21). The male subject desires to be like his hero, to emulate him in all ways, even to the extent of loving the woman he loves. However, the inevitable outcome of mediated desire is disappointment in the female object, prompting the subject to go "through existence from desire to desire" (Girard 1965: 89), either waiting for the mediator to point out another object or choosing a new mediator. The Girardian paradigm privileges the relationship between rival and hero, between men, and situates the woman in the triangle as a conduit for desire that must be prevented from becoming explicitly homosexual.

This construction of woman as merely a passive and empty conduit for male interchange derives from Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, in which "the trade in women" (Newman 1988: 20) emerges as the foundation of culture. The theory of "exchange" which underlies Lévi-Strauss' argument that "marriage is the most fundamental form of gift exchange, and women the most basic of gifts" (20) is, in turn, based on Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur le don*. In this essay, Mauss describes "one of the most remarkable features of primitive societies: the extent to which exchange – giving, receiving, and reciprocating gifts – dominates social intercourse" (Rubin 1975:171).³ This process of gift giving strengthens social bonds between the giver and the receiver of the gift. In *The Professor*, for instance, the process of gift giving

interestingly participates in the notion of woman as object to be given by one man to another. Here, it is not an actual woman that is given, but the portrait of Crimsworth's mother, given to him by Hunsden (Brontë 1980: 185). Lévi-Strauss applies Mauss' theory to marriage and concludes that the primary bond is between the male giver and male receiver of the woman, and not, as one would imagine, between husband and wife:

The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman . . . but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners. (Lévi-Strauss quoted in Newman 1988: 20)

The bonds of kinship that are thus established necessitate incest taboos that enforce exogamy. Rather than the real prevention of incest, however, both the taboos on incest and the function and origins of exogamy are explained as laws regulating the social bonds between men that are forged by the "trade-in-women":

The prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister, or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift . . . Exchange – and consequently the rule of exogamy which express it – has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together, and of superimposing upon the natural links of kinship the henceforth artificial links . . . of alliances governed by rule . . . It provides the fundamental and immutable rule ensuring the existence of the group as a group. (20)

In her critique of Lévi-Strauss' paradigm, Gayle Rubin foregrounds the triangular transactions that inform "the-traffic-in-women" (1975: 157).⁴ How are women affected by these transactions between men, she asks, and "who is organised" when "[k]inship is organisation, and organisation gives power?" (174) If women are the gifts that men give other men, they themselves have, as women, nothing of equal value to give. They can neither give each other – a

mother cannot give her daughter and benefit from it – nor can they give themselves: “As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchange – social organisation” (174).

Luce Irigaray presents a similar argument when she writes that “[w]oman is never anything more than the scene of more or less rival exchange between men” (1981a: 105). Her analysis of this paradigm reveals that it is premised on the destruction of the bonds between women who “exist only as the possibility of mediation, transaction, transition, transference – between man and his fellow creatures, indeed between man and himself” (1981b: 108). As “goods”, the relationship between women “must be relations of rivalry in the interest of tradesmen” (110). Irigaray proposes a radical disruption of the trade in women when she asks: “*But what if the ‘goods’ refused to go to market? What if they maintained among themselves ‘another’ kind of trade?*” (110, emphasis in original) This question, though not as explicitly articulated, preoccupies Brontë and emerges in her novels as an attempt to theorise women’s homosociality in nineteenth-century society, and its representation within the structural confines of the plot of heterosexual marriage that defines the Victorian novel.

Heterosexual marriage is clearly as central to Lèvi-Strauss’ model as it is to the structure of the Victorian novel. Instead of exposing the way in which the system oppresses women, Lèvi-Strauss justifies it, and, as Gayle Rubin points out, “present[s] one of the greatest rip-offs of all time as the root of romance” (1975: 201) when he writes that:

woman could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man’s world she is still a person, and since insofar as she is defined as a sign she must be recognised as a generator of signs. In the matrimonial dialogue of men, woman is never purely what is spoken about; for if women in general represent a certain category of signs, destined to a certain kind of communication, each woman preserves a particular value arising from her talent, before and after marriage, for taking her part in a duet. In contrast to words, which have wholly become signs, woman has remained at once a sign

and a value. This explains why the relations between the sexes have preserved that affective richness, ardour and mystery which doubtless originally permeated the entire universe of human communication. (Lévi-Strauss quoted in Rubin: 201)

The inscription of heterosexual marriage in the Lévi-Strauss model represents yet again, as it does in Girard's, a denial of both male homosexuality and lesbianism. However, whereas the bonds between men are seen as essential to the functioning of society, and potential homosexuality repressed or channelled through Girardian mediated desire, female desire, when it is acknowledged, is always figured as heterosexual or else diseased. This construction of female sexuality coincides with what Irigaray describes as the fundamental "matricide" that informs society and culture (1991: 36):

The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at present . . . let us look at what foundations this edifice is built on . . . This underpinning is woman reproducer of the social order, acting as the infrastructure of that order; all of western culture rests upon the murder of the mother . . . And if we make the foundation of the social order shift, then everything shifts. (Quoted in Whitford 1991: 77)

This is particularly evident in "Girard's exclusion of the mother from the Oedipal triangle" (Moi 1982: 21), which also, interestingly, reveals his indebtedness to Sigmund Freud's triangular theory of heterosexual desire. Toril Moi suggests that as a result of the "missing mother", "Girard's theory of mimetic desire cannot account for feminine desire" (21). Irigaray makes the relationship between Girard and Freud explicit when she argues that, in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard's theory of the communal regulation of violence through the ritual sacrifice of a scapegoat "corresponds to the model of male sexuality described by Freud – the model of tension/discharge/homeostasis" (Whitford 1991: 145). Because he is only concerned with "brotherhood, the pact between brothers", he does not recognise the "more fundamental sacrifice . . . mothers, who are 'a totem prior to any designated totem'" (145, emphasis in

original). Whitford suggests that Irigaray, in opposition to Girard, presents a “plea here not to imitate the sacrificial violence of men by making other women scapegoats to ensure unanimity within communities of women, but to find other ways of resolving conflicts” (146).

In Freud’s account, the Oedipal crisis is, for both girl and boy, the moment of entrance into triangular relationships. The child assumes identification with the parent of her/his own gender, and, according to the psychoanalytical schema, proceeds towards the goal of heterosexual genitality. For both the girl and the boy, “[t]he dual relationship of mother and child is broken into by the father, who prevents the incestuous desires of both his offspring for the mother, whom he alone is allowed to possess” (Mitchell 1984: 230). However, the path for the boy towards “normal male contempt for women” (Brunswick quoted in Chodorow 1978: 113) begins when he relinquishes his desire for the mother out of fear of the father’s threat of castration. Yet, at the same time, he identifies with the father as possessor of the mother, because he is also the possessor of the phallus, and thus superior. In this way, “the boy affirms the relationships which have given mother to father and which will give him, if he becomes a man, a woman of his own” (Rubin 1975: 193). In contrast, the little girl not only enters the triangular Oedipal situation later, she never entirely relinquishes the pre-Oedipal bond with her mother. Whereas the boy fears castration, the little girl discovers her own castration, or lack of the phallus. This, of course, represents Freud’s controversial theory of ‘penis envy’ that mirrors the boy’s ‘castration complex’.

Jacques Lacan reads Freud’s theory as being “about language and the cultural meanings imposed upon anatomy” (188). His association of psychoanalysis and the study of kinship systems points to the underlying connections between Freud’s and Lévi-Strauss’ triangular configurations. The Lacanian distinction between the penis and the ‘phallus’ shifts the concepts of castration, and ‘penis-envy’, from the anatomical (Freud’s position) to the symbolic arena. Since the “phallus is a set of meanings conferred upon the penis” (190), it is the *meaning* of either having, or not having, the phallus that is

focused on. Within the structures of kinship exchange then, “the phallus as a symbolic object . . . is exchanged within and between families” as the “embodiment of the male status, to which men accede, and in which certain rights inhere – among them, the right to a woman” (192). ‘Penis-envy’ is therefore not envy of the actual anatomical penis, but results from the cultural inscription of transactions in which women serve as conduits for the transference of power between men.

In the triangular configuration of the Oedipal complex, the boy who gives up his love for his mother because she belongs to his father, accedes to the rules of exchange of the phallus. He is rewarded by the father who, by not castrating his son, affirms him as also a possessor of the phallus who will one day have a woman of his own. Thus, by severing the pre-Oedipal bond with the mother, for fear of the rivalry inherent in this position vis-à-vis his father, “[t]he boy exchanges his mother for the phallus, the symbolic token which can later be exchanged for a woman” (193). For the girl, however, the entrance into triangular relationships presents a far more complex process. Whereas the incest taboo for the boy applies only to certain women, for the girl it applies to all women:

Since she is in a homosexual position vis-à-vis her mother, the rule of heterosexuality which dominates the scenario makes her position excruciatingly untenable. The mother, and all women by extension, can only be properly beloved by someone ‘with a penis’ (phallus). Since the girl has not the ‘phallus’, she has no ‘right’ to love her mother or another woman, since she is herself destined to some man. She does not have the symbolic token which can be exchanged for a woman. (193-4)

An aspect of the girl’s Oedipal crisis is a realisation that the pre-Oedipal ‘phallic mother’ does not possess the phallus to give. The girl therefore turns to her father as the one to confer the phallus on her, and through whom she can thus enter into the symbolic exchange system in which the phallus circulates. But the phallus always passes through her, it is never hers to give

away. The girl's destiny is to become, like her mother, the woman through whom the phallus passes from man to man, and the process which 'empties out' the woman so that she becomes a tunnel, a vacuous open space, is, as Gayle Rubin describes it, "an act of psychic brutality" (196). The 'successful' outcome of this catastrophe is "a marked lowering of the active sexual impulses and a rise of the passive ones" (196), the development of a masochistic eroticism. Rubin further points out that "[o]ne can read Freud's essays on femininity as descriptions of how a group is prepared psychologically, at a tender age, to live with its oppression" (196).

The assumption of the feminine role is, as Irigaray argues, premised on the daughter's rejection of the mother, which results in her rejection of all women, and also of herself as a woman. Yet, "[w]oman has no reason to envy either the penis or the phallus" (1991: 42):

But the non-establishment of the sexual identity of both sexes [sexes] results in the fact that man, the people of men, has transformed his penis [sexe] into an instrument of power so as to dominate maternal power. (42, translator's parentheses)

Irigaray proposes an alternative economy of desire for women when she counters the "matricide" (36) that informs Western society and culture with a vision of a "genealogy of women" (44):

There is a genealogy of women within our family: on our mothers' side we have mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, and daughters. Given our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. Nor let us forget that we already have a history, that certain women have, even if it was culturally difficult, left their mark on history and that all too often we do not know them. (44)

For Irigaray, woman's discovery of her sexual identity must be located in her

relationship with her mother and, contrary to the Freudian prohibition of the mother-daughter bond, she argues that “[n]either little girl nor woman must give up love for her mother. Doing so uproots them from their identity, their subjectivity” (44). Since patriarchy is founded on the schism between mother and daughter, between woman and woman who are situated as rival objects in an economy of trade between men, Irigaray’s project represents a fundamental challenge: “The relationship between mother/daughter, daughter/mother constitutes an extremely explosive kernel in our societies. To think it, to change it, amounts to undermining the patriarchal order” (quoted in Whitford 1991: 77). The reinstatement of this relationship is of primal importance to the way in which women situate themselves in relation to other women and to their own sexuality and desire:

[G]iven that the first body they have any dealings with is a woman’s body, that the first love they share is mother love, it is important to remember that women always stand in an archaic and primal relationship with what is known as homosexuality. (Irigaray 1991: 44)

The interplay between female genealogy, the daughter/mother relationship and women’s homosocial desire that Irigaray maps, is also a significant aspect of Brontë’s only third-person narrative, *Shirley*. In this novel Brontë attempts to theorise the relationship between women’s homosocial desire and the mother/daughter relationship, situating it as a counter-plot to the plot of heterosexual marriage. Even though this is not Brontë’s first published novel – it comes between Brontë’s two first-person narratives, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* – its explicit concern with women’s homosocial bonds makes it the obvious novel with which to start this thesis. I read *Shirley* as a nineteenth-century *A Room of One’s Own*, comparing Brontë’s project with that of Woolf, who similarly proposes a link between the mother-daughter relationship and female homosocial desire. Brontë’s critique of the Victorian novel here focuses on the silencing of both Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar as the novel closes with their double wedding

In my analysis of *Jane Eyre*, I trace Brontë's preoccupation with the articulation of female desire that, in this novel, challenges the authority of the male autobiographical voice as the voice of the universal subject. Hélène Cixous' notion of the "sortie" (1986: 63) is used to explain Jane's compulsion to speak and to tell the stories of other women, inscribing these women into the nineteenth-century text that assiduously locks them away and silences them. Jane's grasping of the autobiographical voice coincides with her attack on the patriarchal structures that imprison women, yet Jane herself seems to be, at novel's end, speaking from a position of enclosure within the Oedipal triangle.

Although *Villette* similarly grasps narrative voice for Lucy Snowe, the novel is not as self-consciously constructed as autobiography as *Jane Eyre* is. In fact, its complex critique of narrative structure and voice includes that of the traditional autobiography and its ready reliance on memory as incontestable. Instead of reading Lucy Snowe as an unreliable narrator who keeps secrets from herself and others, I see her as Brontë's final challenge to the containing and silencing structures of patriarchal texts. In *Villette*, the triangular relationships that are set up in *The Professor*, and the concomitant focus on male homosocial desire in that novel, are inverted to represent instead a focus on female homosocial desire that radically subverts traditional representations of female sexuality. Fundamental to this representation is the notion that female desire and sexuality is not singular and heterosexual, but multiple and inclusive of lesbian desire. Lucy's preferred triangular configurations are those that situate a male as mediator between her and another woman.

The moments of repressed lesbian desire in *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre* become far more visible in *Villette* and it is this, I argue, that causes Brontë's contemporaries to respond with such discomfort to both the novel and its narrator, Lucy Snowe. Lucy does not marry at novel's end and she sets up a school for girls, which she runs without the help of a male partner. This seems to suggest that the "goods" do "get together" in Lucy's text. The revolutionary nature of this situation, particularly within the context of nineteenth-century gender construction and ideology, is apparent. Even if the sexual component

is absent from a relationship between women that exists outside the boundaries of patriarchy, it is still a threat to that system because it exists as an alternative in which women live without men. A single woman who refuses to marry, in a society where marriage is held up to be the pinnacle of (middle-class) women's aspirations, must be seen as utterly subversive. How much more so, then, when she sets up home with another woman, or a group of women?

The focus on marriage as the most desirable destiny for women, and the substantial ideological machinery that kept it in place, seems to suggest that single women represented a real threat to patriarchy. The nineteenth-century stigmatisation of spinsters, evident in W. R. Greg's description of unmarried women as "redundant" and "*the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured*" (quoted in Poovey 1988: 2, emphasis in original), signals an underlying anxiety about female sexuality that bourgeois marriage seeks to assuage. However, as Mary Poovey suggests:

The representation of women not only as dependent but as needing the control that was the other face of protection was integral to the separation of the spheres and everything that followed from it, because this image provided a defensible explanation for inequality. If women were governed not by reason (like men), but by something else, then they could hardly be expected (or allowed) to participate in the economic and political fray. (1988: 11)

The control of female sexuality implemented through marriage thus also constitutes an economic, political and ideological strategy to maintain control of power. An unmarried woman, for instance, maintained all her legal rights as "a 'feme sole', that is to say a free and independent individual" (Basch 1974: 16), including the right to own property. If women therefore form bonds with other women exclusively, the automatic consolidation of power established between men as a result of the trade-in-women is short-circuited. Thus, although nineteenth-century England might seem far removed from the societies cited by Lévi-Strauss and Rubin, the exchange of women by men as a strategy for

power transference and consolidation remains central to the novelistic tradition of the time, as it inscribes heterosexual marriage at closure.

It is this structural inscription of patriarchal ideology that Charlotte Brontë's novels expose and resist through a strategic use of mimicry. In the process, the novels challenge the authority of the male narrative voice and its appropriation of the language of desire. Instead, an alternative, female discourse of desire is introduced and tested in an attempt to dislocate or subvert the rigid boundaries set by compulsory heterosexual marriage and its displacement of female homosocial relationships. This thesis thus aims to explore how Brontë's re-inscription of female homosocial desire into a narrative structure that privileges "the 'canonical' triangular arrangement of male desire" destabilises "this supposedly intractable patriarchal structure" (Castle 1997: 536).

Notes to Introduction

¹ The stereotype of female rivalry current at the time Brontë wrote is illustrated by Eliza Lynn Linton's contemporary description of what she sees as an inherently female quality:

I doubt if any woman's friendship ever existed free from jealousy. If we are not jealous about men we are about other women, and guard our rights against division with the vigilance of a housedog guarding his domain. No man can understand the unrelenting pettiness of jealousy that exists between women-friends: no man knows it for his own part, and no man would submit to it from his friend. (Quoted in Nestor 1985: 66)

² Irigaray, of course, also suggests that, although "[h]omosexuality is the law that regulates the socio-cultural order" (1981b: 107), patriarchy excludes male homosexuality precisely because it exposes "*the sovereign authority of pretence which does not yet recognise its endogamies*":

'Other' – masculine – homosexual relations would be equally subversive and thus, forbidden. By interpreting openly the law of social functioning, they risk indeed the displacement of its horizon. Moreover, they bring into question the nature, the status, the 'exogamic' necessity of proceeds from trade. By short-circuiting the commercial transactions, would they also expose what is really at stake in such dealings? Masculine homosexual relations devalue the exalted worth of the standard of value. When the penis itself becomes simply a means of pleasure, and indeed a means of pleasure among men, *the phallus loses its power*. Pleasure, so it is said, should be left to the women, those creatures so unfit for the seriousness of symbolic rules. (107 – 8, emphasis in original)

³ I rely on Karen Newman and Gayle Rubin's analyses of the theories of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss.

⁴ Rubin's influential essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes towards a political economy of sex", is also central to Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

Chapter 1

“We will go – you and I alone, Caroline – to that wood”: Mapping female genealogy and desire in *Shirley*.

The most holy band of society is friendship.

Mary Wollstonecraft – *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

You allude to the subject of female friendship and express wonder at the infrequency of sincere attachments amongst women – As to married women, I can well understand that they should be absorbed in their husbands and children – but single women often like each other much and derive great solace from their mutual regard.

Charlotte Brontë – Letter to W. S. Williams (1850)

For we think back through our mothers if we are women.

Virginia Woolf – *A Room of One's Own*

★

When Virginia Woolf thinks back through her literary mothers in *A Room of One's Own*, she lays *Pride and Prejudice* next to *Jane Eyre* in an act of daughterly comparison. Jane Austen emerges as the *good* mother who wrote “without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching” (1977: 65), whereas Charlotte Brontë becomes, if not the *bad* mother, the one with whom the daughter's relationship is fraught with ambivalence and anxiety. She is the angry mother whose rage spills over into the text, “le[aving] her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance” (65). Her “ignorance”, “fear”, “acidity”, her “buried suffering smouldering beneath her passion”, her “rancour” and “pain”, contaminate the text with her female self, her “sex” (70). Austen, Woolf admiringly remarks, “looked at . . . and laughed at” the “man's sentence” whereas Brontë, regardless of “her splendid gift for prose, stumbled and fell” (73). Brontë's laughter, in contrast to Austen's, is equated with the mad, mocking laughter of Bertha Mason/Rochester that punctuates Jane Eyre's soliloquy in which she demands for women, not a room in which to write, but an escape from confinement in patriarchal rooms and houses.

Reading Jane's anger and dissatisfaction as Brontë's own, Woolf does

not question its validity, but criticises the way in which it interrupts and disrupts Brontë's novel. In *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman*, Jane Marcus notes that Woolf's criticism is "directed at Haworth parsonage, not at Brontë" (132). Yet it is also apparent that Woolf's criticism goes beyond an analysis of the social constriction suffered by Brontë. It is, as Cora Kaplan has suggested, "a devastating, controlled, yet somehow uncontrolled indictment" (1988: 171) of Brontë who, Woolf writes:

will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself when she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot. How could she help but die young, cramped and thwarted? (1977: 67)

The severity of this criticism recalls Brontë's own rejection of Jane Austen in letters to G.H. Lewes. In a similar process of comparison, Brontë aligns herself with the poetic and "masculine George Sand" (Wise and Symington 1932: II 180), and is "puzzled" by Lewes' admiration: "Why do you like Miss Austen so much?" (179) she asks. Austen, because she is "without *poetry*, maybe *is* sensible, real (more *real* than true), but she cannot be great" (181, emphasis in original). After reading *Pride and Prejudice* she writes:

And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotype of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses. (179)

Brontë's view of Austen must be read within the context set by Lewes' "recommend[ation]" that she would benefit from reading Austen's novels. She clearly resents the implications of his suggestion and concludes her letter to him: "I submit to your anger, which I have now excited (for have I not questioned the perfection of your darling?) . . . I will, when I can, . . . diligently

peruse all Miss Austen's works, as you recommend" (181). Does the playful tone here perhaps disguise a more serious sense of rivalry in which Brontë places herself as the more passionate writer in opposition to Austen, who "rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood", the passions (III 99)? In a letter to her publisher, W. S. Smith, she again places her response to Austen, this time after reading *Emma*, in the context of her relationship with Lewes when she writes that, were she to express her views "to some people (Lewes for instance) they would directly accuse [her] of advocating exaggerated heroics" (99).¹

One may argue that it was necessary for Brontë to dissociate herself from the mother figure Austen represented. Perhaps Austen's life epitomised for Brontë the external restrictions and conventions of her own circumstances as a spinster, as well as the emotional and sexual repression this implies. The almost automatic identification with this type of mother figure must therefore be rejected in favour of a mother figure who more accurately represents the inner reality or desires of the daughter, as Brontë's identification with the rebellious, passionate (and foreign) Sand illustrates.

The intricacies of influence and allegiance that Brontë's letters negotiate anticipate Virginia Woolf's more self-conscious literary project to establish a genealogy of literary foremothers, begun in her early essays on Austen and the Brontës in *The Common Reader*, and continued in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's preference for the "impersonal" Austen (1977: 136) presents a similar process of dissociation from a foremother whose rage, verging on madness, is too familiar and threatening. Jane Marcus, for instance, traces Woolf's "growth into an angry old woman" (1988: 123) and notes that she poured this anger into her political writing in an attempt, one may argue, to avoid the contamination of the fictional text of which she accuses Brontë. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf had established the connection between "clever girls" and madness when describing Margaret Cavendish as "the crazy Duchess [who] became a bogey to frighten clever girls with" (60). Is it not possible that Woolf's response to the anger and potential madness in Brontë's writing results from the anxiety

generated by her own “breakdowns . . . her state of excitement and euphoria, her ‘high’ that preceded headaches and insomnia, these the prelude to dissociation, hallucination, abstention from food and sometimes a lapse into indifference and a catatonic state” (Edel 1981: 197)? Woolf’s position vis-à-vis Brontë is perhaps best understood within the context of Adrienne Rich’s term “matrophobia” which Rich defines as “the fear . . . of *becoming one’s mother*” (1977: 237, emphasis in original). “But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia”, Rich writes, “there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely” (237).²

This is not to suggest that Woolf hated Brontë, but to allow for the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship, whether symbolic or biological. Brontë and Woolf were both, to use Rich’s description, “wildly unmothered” (226). In a letter quoted by Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë’s longing for the mother she lost when she was five, and the way in which this loss is exacerbated by the subsequent loss of her siblings, is poignantly expressed:

A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put in my hands a little packet of letters and papers, – telling me that they were mamma’s, and that I might read them. I did read them, in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born: it was strange now to peruse, for the first time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order . . . I wished she had lived, and that I had known her . . . All through this month of February, I have had a crushing time of it. I could not escape from or rise above certain most mournful recollections, – the last days, the sufferings, the remembered words – most sorrowful to me, of those who, Faith assures me, are now happy. (1985: 399)

Similarly, Woolf, whose mother died as she reached puberty, always thought of herself as “a motherless woman” (Marcus 1988: 85). This sense of maternal loss was however experienced prior to the actual death of her mother

because, as Rich argues in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, “during Virginia’s early years [her mother] expended almost all her maternal energies in caring for her husband and his life work” (1977: 237). It is a relationship Rich sees fictionalised in the “complex and passionate vision of mother-daughter schism” (228) in *To the Lighthouse*. Like Brontë’s letter, Woolf’s autobiographical writing reflects a profound sense of loss when writing about her mother. Her “first memory” is:

of red and purple flowers on a black background – my mother’s dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. (1976: 64)

A few pages further, she refers back to this memory, relating it explicitly to the death of her mother:

How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby, who can just distinguish a great blot of blue and purple on a black background, into the child who thirteen years later can feel all that I felt on May 5th 1895 – now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago – when my mother died. (79)

The moment of maternal loss represents for both writers a defining moment, not only as “motherless children”, a state Phyllis Chesler ascribes to all women in patriarchal society (quoted in Rich 1977: 91), but also as writers. In both cases, this loss becomes imbedded in the act of writing. Brontë’s relationship with the mother she was too young to know is established via letters written by her mother to her father. These letters form a tentative link between daughter and absent mother and come to represent the mother’s body for the daughter in the same way Woolf fills the landscape of memory with *her* mother’s body. The importance of letters in Brontë’s novels could be seen to result from this transference of signification. It is also evident in her dependence on letters to ameliorate the intense isolation she suffered and

which affected her ability to write. In a letter quoted by Gaskell, she writes: "I cannot help feeling something of the excitement of expectation till the post hour comes, and when, day after day, it brings nothing, I get low . . . If I could write, I dare say I should be better, but I cannot write a line" (1985: 399).

In a more explicit way, Woolf establishes the memory of her mother, whom she had known for only thirteen years, as the touchstone for her creativity. The sensual nature of the daughter's intimacy with her mother's body in the quoted extract anticipates the eroticism implicit in the image Woolf uses to describe the pleasure she felt when her mother praised a story she had written: "It was like being a violin and being played upon" (quoted in Marcus 1988: 85). Writing is, for the daughter, a means to give pleasure to the mother whose pleasure, in turn, draws from the daughter not only intense pleasure, but more writing. This mother-daughter relationship then represents a paradigm for the source of female creative inspiration that Woolf describes in a letter to Ethyl Smyth: "It is true that I only want to show off to women. Women alone stir my imagination" (85). Woolf's position here is an example of what Luce Irigaray describes as a fundamental aspect of female desire which has, however, been ignored or denied to privilege the relationship between father and daughter:

As for women, would it not be more likely that they are trying to demonstrate something to their mothers, to other women? The fact that the father sees this purely as something which has been staged for his benefit can presumably be interpreted as meaning that in his case the scopic drive predominates, as the *belief* that a woman's desire can only be addressed to him. (1991: 101, emphasis in original)

In Woolf's *Orlando*, for instance, the playful eroticism generated by a woman writer showing off to a woman reader presents narrative desire and pleasure as homoerotic.³ Written for and about Vita Sackville-West, *Orlando* is described by Nigel Nicolson (Sackville-West's son) as

the longest and most charming love-letter in literature in which she [Woolf] explores Vita, weaves her in and out of the centuries, tosses her from one sex to the other, plays with her, dresses her in furs, lace and emeralds, teases her, flirts with her, drops a veil of mist around her, and ends by photographing her in the mud at Long Barn, with dogs, awaiting Virginia's arrival next day. (1973: 209)

The “text as gift” (Meese 1997: 469) is also a gesture of compensation. For Vita, the most valued gift was that “the novel identified her with Knole for ever. Virginia by her genius had provided Vita with a unique consolation for having been born a girl, for her exclusion from her inheritance” (Nicolson 1973: 214). The female Orlando does, at novel's end, retain her inheritance whereas Sackville-West could not inherit Knole, her “first passion . . . and her greatest lost love” (Lee 1997: 487), because she was a woman.

Whilst the two texts are clearly very different and motivated by different impulses, I want to suggest that in *Shirley*, Brontë constructs a similar fantasy of compensation when she transforms her sister Emily, who died during the time of its writing, into the heiress, Shirley Keeldar. In her biography of Brontë, Gaskell writes that, according to Brontë, Shirley is “what Emily Brontë would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity” (1985: 379). This portrayal of Emily has been criticised as “unconvincing” (Gérin 1979: 235) and “largely superficial” (236), but it also suggests, as Gérin points out, a degree of “wishful thinking . . . as if the author were pursuing a vanishing ideal that she needed to believe had once existed” (235). In a letter to her publisher, Brontë's sense of loss, not only of a sister, but also of a valued reader of her work, is expressed:

I try to write now and then. The effort was a hard one at first. It renewed the terrible loss of last December strangely. Worse than useless did it seem to attempt to write what there no longer lived an ‘Ellis Bell’ to read; the whole book, with every hope founded on it faded to vanity and vexation of spirit. (Quoted in Hook 1985: 16)

Emily is both the inspiration for Shirley and also Brontë's imagined and anticipated audience/reader in the same way that Woolf writes both for and about Vita Sackville-West who is thus also positioned as her novel's ideal reader. Brontë's loss of a community of sisters, which is also a community of women readers and writers, significantly influences the development of *Shirley*. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell retells Brontë's description of this female homosocial community as follows:

The sisters retained the old habit, which was begun in their aunt's life-time, of putting away their work at nine o'clock, and beginning their study, pacing up and down the sitting room. At this time, they talked over the stories they were engaged upon, and described their plots. Once or twice a week, each read to the others what she had written, and heard what they had to say about it. Charlotte told me, that the remarks made had seldom any effect in inducing her to alter her work, so possessed was she with the feeling that she had described reality; but the readings were of great and stirring interest to all, taking them out of the gnawing pressure of daily-recurring cares, and setting them in a free place. (1985: 307)

The influence of this loss on the form of the novel is apparent in the tensions between the comedy and playfulness of the first sections and the more sombre and even pessimistic last third, written after the deaths of both Emily and Anne (beginning with Chapter XXIV: "The Valley of the Shadow of Death"). It is thus perhaps not surprising that G. H. Lewes wrote that in *Shirley* "all unity . . . is wanting . . . The authoress never seems distinctly to have made up her mind as to what she was to do" (quoted in Hook 1985: 10). This lack of structural unity did, of course, also result from other difficulties of intention and focus that I shall discuss below.

However, in drawing a comparison between *Orlando* and *Shirley* within the context of a homoerotics of reading and writing, the first section of Brontë's novel does appear to fit more comfortably. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, here, "[w]hen Shirley plays the captain to Caroline's modest maiden, their coy banter and testing infuses the relationship with a fine, subtle sexuality that is

markedly absent from their manipulative heterosexual relationships" (1984: 381). Whereas Woolf's modernist text can openly and self-consciously engage with the masquerade of gender played out by Orlando, Brontë's attempt to represent Emily's androgyny in the figure of the "grave but gallant little cavalier" (Brontë 1983: 158), Shirley, is circumscribed by both narrative and social convention. By creating Shirley, "a pioneer, first of that long line of boyish, independent heroines who have made such a lively mark on English fiction" (Lane 1983: vii), Brontë can however be seen to anticipate Woolf's creation of Orlando. Her fascination with the masquerade of gender construction coincides, as it does for Woolf, with an analysis of female homosocial relationships.

If *Shirley* is a textual foremother of the more flamboyant and transgressive *Orlando*, then its critique of women's social and financial position in nineteenth-century British society also anticipates Woolf's project in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's view that "books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (1977: 77) is borne out by the many similarities of concern between the two texts. In *Tradition Counter Tradition*, Joseph Boone argues that "Woolf became the first important critic to address the potentially innovative consequences of using women's personal relationships as a literary model for narrative relations" (1987: 281). He points out that for Woolf "the depiction of women like Chloe and Olivia without men could free the representation of female identity from the conventional iconography fantasised by men, substituting in its place the reality of 'women as they are'" (281).

I want to suggest that an earlier analysis of "women as they are" is fictionalised in Brontë's *Shirley*. In this text "those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex" (Woolf 1977: 81) can be found. Yet Brontë's novel also recognises that female homosocial relationships are shaped and affected by their location within a social (patriarchal) structure and

hence Caroline and Shirley “are [also] shown in their relation to men” (81).

Shirley thus attempts to theorise women’s issues within the constraints of a Victorian novel that demands closure in marriage. This reading allows one to see the complexities of structure not so much as a failure on the part of the writer (as G .H. Lewes suggests), but as a challenge to narrative and social expectation that radically interrogates the representation of women as contained and silenced.⁴ Whereas the first-person narrators in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* take possession of narrative voice and authority as *female* autobiographers, the third-person narrator in *Shirley* performs an act of narrative usurpation that is far more subtle.

Brontë’s admiration for Thackeray may be evident in her attempt to imitate the “big, detailed world picture” of his novels as Charles Burkhart argues (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 681), but it is perhaps her attempt to imitate his narrative style that is most evident in *Shirley*. Commenting on Thackeray’s narrative style, J. I. M. Stewart, for instance, describes the way in which the reader is “constantly and deliberately kept aware of the puppeteer” (1985: 20), or author, in *Vanity Fair*. According to him this is not a “defect”, but an example of “Thackeray’s special quality” (20). For Stewart, “[i]t is because his creation *is* always distinguishably and avowedly his creation that he can stroll through it as he does, and comment as he pleases, with so little effect of intrusion or impertinence” (20). Since the nineteenth-century omniscient narrator is, like God, always and already gendered as male, Brontë, by using this style of narration, usurps the authority of the male author who postures as omniscient narrator and enters into the text with commentary that is “always distinguishably and avowedly” (Stewart 1985: 20) *his*. Brontë’s need for disguise is apparent, because, in contrast to this masculine self-confidence and authority, the woman writer who enters into the text to deliver commentary on society as it is represented in her text, risks censure and humiliation by speaking in public. For her, “the distinctive nineteenth-century conception of the writer as walker, a sort of man about town with ample leisure and money to roam the city and look about him” (Bowlby 1992: 27), personified by

Thackeray's narrator, becomes a dangerous metaphor because it further compromises her reputation. By becoming a public walker in and through her text, she risks being contaminated by the implications of sexual availability and vulnerability inherent in the metaphor that suggests, for women, 'street walking' or prostitution.

Like Orlando, who dresses herself in "the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion" (Woolf 1942: 124) in order to walk through the city at night, the narrator in *Shirley* impersonates the masculine voice of the nineteenth-century omniscient narrator as she dons the costume of the *flâneur*. The strategy Brontë uses here duplicates the way in which she and other women writers use a male pseudonym that allows them to "walk more freely about the provinces of literature that were ordinarily forbidden to ladies" (Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 65). Brontë's explanation for the choice of pseudonyms for herself and her sisters, for example, illustrates the complexities of creative identity experienced by the woman writer:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes used for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. (Quoted in Gordon 1995: 141)⁵

Brontë's description of her "ambiguous choice" alerts one to the absence of any desire to become "positively masculine" (141). To escape the critics' "prejudice" against "authoresses", the pseudonym becomes a "veil" (141) – in itself an ambiguous metaphor – behind which female identity is hidden, not erased or denied. This female identity is however also recognised as transgressive because it does not conform to prescribed gender roles. Its expression in "writing and thinking was not what is *called* feminine" (141).

emphasis added). Putting on the “veil” of an “ambiguous” pseudonym represents, for Brontë, a complex metaphors of disguise. Her reluctance to “declare ourselves women” coincides with her refusal to become “positively masculine” (141), and this, in turn, illustrates her refusal to submit to the rigid constructions of gender identity demanded by Victorian society.

Shirley's third-person narrator mimics convention only to interrogate the position of women in society and the construction of gender in and by the novel. The focus is not on male homosocial relationships, as it is in the male-narrated *The Professor*, but on the relationships between women within the structural confines of both patriarchal society and the novel. The narrative voice that increasingly privileges Caroline Helstone's perspective performs, as I have suggested above, a function similar to Orlando's masculine costume because it can be discarded in the company of women (readers).

Orlando, for instance, almost immediately discovers precisely that world of “street walkers” that the metaphor of the (woman) writer as walker insinuates and is duly taken by Nell, one of the women, to “her lodging” (125). Dressed as a man Orlando is admitted into that world as a client, but as soon as she “flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman”, Nell also stops her performance “put on to gratify [Orlando's] masculinity”: “on discovering that they were of the same sex, her manner changed and she dropped her plaintive, appealing ways” (125). As a woman, Orlando is “elected a member” of the group of women who “had a society of their own” (126). The narrative here clearly makes fun of the taboos Orlando's transvestism and night walking transgress because, even though she does not in fact become a prostitute, she is absorbed into their company.

Orlando's escape from the “society of [male] wits” such as Pope and Addison and their contempt of women, which she experiences as a slap in the face – “for really she felt as if the little man had struck her” (124) – leads her to the company of these women where she listens to “the fine tales they told” and “the amusing observations they made” (126). The narrative hovers on the point of revealing what happens “when women get together” and telling “[a]ll

they desire" (126). But it interrupts itself, stating that women "are always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print" (126). It is silenced in its attempt to define women's desire because "the gentlemen took the very words out of our mouths", declaring instead that "[w]omen have no desires" (126). The gentlemen's opinion that "women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion" (127) is, of course, contradicted by the textual example of Orlando's enjoyment of the company of women. It is further called into question by the biographer/historian's statement that "Orlando professed great enjoyment in the society of her own sex, and [we] leave it to the gentlemen to prove, as they are very fond of doing, that this is impossible" (127).

It does not seem as if a fictional analysis of the relationships between women would represent a breach of Victorian moral conduct. The popularity of a novel such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* contradicts any notion that the Victorian reading public saw a village "in possession of the Amazons" (Gaskell 1991: 1) as anything but amusing and entertaining. However, as Nina Auerbach points out, "one shrewd critic, a woman, . . . familiar . . . with the subtle modulations of female rebellion and rage" (1978: 78) did, at the time of publication, attack both *Cranford* and Brontë's *Villette* for being equally a "boiling over of the political cauldron" (Margaret Oliphant quoted in Auerbach: 78):

Here is your true revolution. France is but one of the Western Powers; woman is the half of the world. Talk of a balance of power which may be adjusted by taking a Crimea, or fighting a dozen battles – here is a battle which must always be going forward – a balance of power only to be decided by single combat, deadly and uncompromising, where the combatants, so far from being guided by the old punctilios of the duello, make no secret of their ferocity, but throw sly javelins at each other, instead of shaking hands before they begin. (78)

Brontë herself called the book "graphic, pithy, penetrating, shrewd" (quoted in Auerbach: 92).⁶ *Shirley* does not choose as its focus the depiction of such a

separatist community but instead presents a plot of female friendship running parallel to the traditional marriage plot. Female friendship is shown as part of a larger social structure, controlled by men, which shapes and often limits the possibilities of relationships between women. In doing so it conforms to Raymond Williams' definition of the "realist tradition in fiction" (1975: 304):

It offers a valuing of a whole way of life, a society that is larger than any of the individuals composing it, and at the same time valuing creations of human beings who, while belonging to and affected by and helping to define this way of life, are also, in their own terms, absolute ends in themselves . . . The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms. (305)

Shirley looks specifically at the relationship between a society dominated and controlled by men, and the women who are dominated and controlled as the property of men. It does so from the radical perspective of a woman, one of the dominated and controlled, who, as I have suggested above, uses the narrative conventions of traditional realism to grasp a platform from which to comment and judge. In her article on *Shirley*, Susan Zlotnick argues that Brontë "[launch[es] an exploration of women in history and women's exclusion from history" and thus "writes in *Shirley* a woman's history of England" (1991: 282). Zlotnick's argument is particularly interesting for its non-traditional view that Brontë,

in direct opposition to the male critics of industrialism . . . embraces – and even celebrates – the industrial present in *Shirley*, ardently (if somewhat misguidedly) believing in capitalism's power to transcend patriarchal structures and to loosen the ties that bind all women. (283)

She further argues that Brontë uses the attack on Robert Moore's mill, and Shirley and Caroline's observation of it from a nearby hill (Chapter XIX), as a

“paradigm for the place of women in (male) history” (285). Women are not only marginalised, but they have to rely on what they hear: “In (male) history, women hear about events second-hand through mediating narratives that distort and falsify the experience” (286). For instance, Fanny and Eliza, the parsonage servants, tell Shirley and Caroline the following morning that “twenty men were killed” and “the mill was burnt to the ground” (Brontë 1983: 279), while according to Moore, “not a single man [was] hurt on our side” (285). Thus Brontë illustrates the “unreliability of historical narratives” (Zlotnick 1991: 286) and comments on the impact this has on women's lives.

The need to establish an intersubjective relationship with her mother makes Caroline Helstone, and not Shirley Keeldar, the disruptive feminist agent in a narrative that attempts to think through the possibilities of female homosocial relationships under patriarchy and which connects these explicitly to the daughter-mother relationship. The criticism that the novel levels at the erasure of the mother from the daughter's life and the impact this has on the daughter's sense of her self and her ability to form bonds with other women, is hidden in what appears to be a straightforward plotting towards marriage. Brontë's strategy is to place a plot of female friendship running parallel to the traditional marriage plot and to embed in it a sub-plot that recuperates the mother. Thus the text illustrates and comments on the inescapable influence of marriage on women's homosocial relationships. Marriage defines woman's value and achievement within society, whereas female friendship is shown to have the potential to disrupt “the structure that maintains the structure”, as Tony Tanner describes bourgeois heterosexual marriage (quoted in Boone 1987: 5).

In *Shirley* the analysis of women's confinement in a male-dominated society coincides with a complex interrogation of women's place within society as “motherless children” (Chesler quoted in Rich 1977: 91). Caroline persistently longs for her mother, even though this mother abandoned her as a child to the care of her drunkard father. The father's cruelty and neglect of the child is an indictment of not only the father, but also, it at first seems, of the

mother who could leave her daughter in the care of a man whose treatment she herself could not endure. Caroline's "dark recollection" (Brontë 1983: 79) of her life with her father represents a state of complete isolation, deprivation and fear. She remembers:

[S]ome weeks that she had spent with him in a great town somewhere, when she had had no maid to take care of her; when she had been shut up, day and night, in a high garret-room, without a carpet, with a bare uncurtained bed, and scarcely any other furniture; when he went out early every morning, and often forgot to return and give her her dinner during the day, and at night, when he came back, was like a madman, furious, terrible; or – still more – like an idiot, imbecile, senseless. (79 – 80)

The actual location and time of this experience is repressed but what she remembers and knows is that "she had fallen ill in this place" and that this illness was treated not with care, but with the threat that her father "would kill her" (80). She saves herself by screaming, and is taken to her father's brother, Mr Helstone. This memory that surfaces during a conversation with her uncle about marriage unexpectedly elicits compassion from the daughter for the mother who had abandoned her. Instead of indicting her as a bad mother, Caroline expresses an understanding of her mother's behaviour because they had suffered abuse by the same man. She surprises her uncle, to whom she had never previously spoken of her parents during the twelve years she had lived with him, by saying: "If my mother suffered what I suffered when I was with papa, she must have had a dreadful time" (80). Her expression of loyalty to her mother represents an act of profound subversion in a society that demands that the daughter cast off the mother's influence so as to attach herself to the father.

Caroline insists on bringing her mother back into the text – "'Where is she?' had been on Caroline's lips hundreds of times before; but till now she had never uttered it" (80) – and the text itself colludes in this recuperation of the mother in the daughter's narrative. This challenges the plot structure of

Victorian realist fiction within which “maternal repression stands at the very basis of the structure of plot” (Hirsch 1989: 50). Marianne Hirsch argues that Freud's 1908 essay “Family Romances” enables us to see that this “maternal repression actually engenders the female fiction, a fiction which then revolves not around the drama of same sex parent/child relations, but around marriage which alone can place women's stories in a position of participating in the dynamics of ambition, authority, and legitimacy” (57) which constitute nineteenth-century realist plots. The representation of the daughter's desire for her mother in *Shirley* challenges this paradigm. The plot of marriage thus performs a mimesis of conformity that camouflages the novel's attempts to expose the ways in which female homosociality must either serve marriage or be erased from the text.

The ‘lack’ Caroline experiences is, quite clearly, the absence of her mother and not the phallus as represented by a father figure. When Mr Helstone forbids her to see Robert Moore and his sister, Hortense, she suffers an “intolerable despair” (Brontë 1983: 147) which, the text makes clear, is not solely because she loves Moore: “She longed for something else: the deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily” (148). The need to re-establish the connection with her mother coincides with her desire to find some purpose in life, and leads, in the instance of her first physical decline, to her meeting with Shirley Keeldar and her governess, Mrs Pryor. Caroline however continues to suffer, though perhaps less acutely, from the debilitating effects of the absence of her mother. She is, for instance, “slow to make fresh acquaintance” because she felt “people could not want her – that she could not amuse them” (162). The daughter's reaction to the absence or loss of her mother is, according to Irigaray, unlike that theorised by Freud in his account of the *fort-da* game. She argues that Freud's paradigm in which the boy “come[s] to terms with the absence of his mother, so that language acquisition takes place in the situation of loss or absence” (Whitford 1991: 160) represents a relationship of control in which men “keep the mother at a distance” (161). In contrast, the daughter's acquisition of language is “not by

introjection, as with the boy, but *with* the mother" (160, emphasis in original):

The girl-subject does not master anything, except perhaps her own silence, her becoming, her excesses. Unlike the boy, she has no objects. She is split differently in two and the object or the aim is to reunite the two by a gesture, to make the two touch again, perhaps to repeat the moment of birth, in order not to regress thoughtlessly, to remain whole, sometimes to stand upright. They do not want to master the other, but to create themselves. (Irigaray quoted by Whitford 1991: 160)

Only when the link between the daughter and her mother is re-established, and the mother is able to explain her motivations for leaving to her daughter, can Caroline relate to people from a position of strength, not vulnerability. The shift in her position is particularly evident in her relationship with Robert Moore. This is not to suggest that the tale ends happily for Caroline when she marries Robert Moore, but to consider the implications of her refusal to "desert" her mother "even for [Moore's] sake" (Brontë 1983: 507).

The two periods of illness that Caroline suffers in the novel recall, and re-enact, the illness she suffered as a child alone in the garret room, the victim of a man who neglected her and who had absolute control over whether she lived or died. The six-year-old child's withdrawal into illness becomes in itself a demand to be taken care of by the mother who never comes, and remains as a symptom of psychological distress into adulthood. Thus Caroline's loss of appetite and decline result in each instance from Robert's sudden coldness towards her. Her first decline is counteracted by her friendship with Shirley, yet Robert's apparent attraction to Shirley and her voluntary withdrawal from the friendship with Caroline again cause Caroline to fall ill. Only when Mrs Pryor comes to nurse her, and reveals her identity as Caroline's mother, does she express a real desire to get better: "But if you *are* my mother, the world is all changed to me. Surely I can live – I should like to recover" (339).

Mrs Pryor's language in this scene of maternal revelation consistently refers to the physical bond between mother and daughter that had been

severed, resulting in Caroline being “so neglected, so repulsed, left so desolate” (338). She presents herself to Caroline as the body that gave birth to the daughter and speaks of her heart as “the source whence yours was filled: that from *my* veins issued the tide which flows in *yours*” (338). Caroline is claimed as her “own child” (339) and in a passage that I quote in full to illustrate its intensity of expression, the normally reticent and withdrawn Mrs Pryor uses language to re-establish the physical bond with her daughter:

It means that, if I have given you nothing else, I at least gave you life; that I bore you – nursed you; that I am your true mother; no other woman can claim the title – it is *mine* . . . I say you are *mine*. I have proved it. I thought perhaps you were all his, which would have been a cruel dispensation for me: I find it is *not* so. God permitted me to be the parent of my child’s mind; it belongs to me: it is my property – my *right* . . . the outside *he* [the father] conferred; but the heart and the brain are *mine*: the germs are from *me*. (339, emphasis in original)

Mrs Pryor here also challenges the traditional view of the father’s dominant role in procreation by asserting that the “germs” (339) derive from her, the mother, not the father. Caroline’s response echoes the intensity of her mother’s language and she reciprocates by also claiming or ‘owning’ her mother: “My mother! My own mother!” (339).

The improvement in Caroline’s health that this relationship brings about becomes apparent especially when she describes the “source” of it to Robert Moore who sees “health on [her] cheek, and hope in [her] eye”, describing it as “this sunshine I perceive about you” (472). She tells him about the joy and fulfilment the relationship with her mother gives her, and in doing so, she again inserts the mother-daughter plot into the plot of marriage represented by her relationship with Moore. The text thus creates a site for the daughter’s narrative of love for her mother within the framework of the lovers’ dialogue. Attention is, as a result, shifted away from the plot of marriage and the daughter-mother relationship is confirmed as at least equally important for Caroline.

For one thing, I am happy in mamma: I love her so much, and she loves me. Long and tenderly she nursed me; now, when her care has made me well, I can occupy myself for and with her all the day. I say it is my turn to attend to her; and I *do* attend to her: I am her waiting woman, as well as her child: I like – you would laugh if you knew what pleasure I have in making dresses and sewing for her. She looks so nice now, Robert: I will not let her be old fashioned. And then, she is so charming to talk to: full of wisdom; ripe in judgement; rich in information; exhaustless in stores her observant faculties have quietly amassed. Every day that I live with her, I like her better; I esteem her more highly; I love her more tenderly. (473)

Contrary to the claustrophobic scene of merging between mother and daughter that classic Freudian psychoanalysis posits as detrimental to the daughter's development⁷, Caroline describes the daughter-mother relationship as one of reciprocity and abundance. Caroline does not represent herself as the passive recipient of motherly nurturing and care, but constructs the relationship as active and enabling for both daughter and mother.

This representation of the mother-daughter relationship is strikingly different from the way in which it is conventionally portrayed in the nineteenth-century novel. Marianne Hirsch, for instance, lists examples of what she terms "maternal repression" (1989: 44) such as "dead mothers", "trivialised comic mothers", "malevolent yet inconsequential mothers", and "ineffectual, silenced mothers" (44). In contrast, *Shirley* interrogates this repression as a divisive tool used by patriarchy to separate the daughter from the mother and to silence the mother's voice as a source of potential criticism against the rule of the fathers. The "wisdom", "judgement" and "information" (Brontë 1983: 473) Caroline praises when speaking about her mother constructs the conversation between mother and daughter as potentially subversive. Mrs Pryor's indictment of patriarchal marriage and the laws of society that "were powerless as a rotten bulrush to protect [her]! – impotent as idiot babblings to restrain [her husband]!" (341) is integral to the story she tells Caroline to explain why she had abandoned her own daughter. The narrative here gives primacy to the

voice of the abused woman who describes her “bondage” (343) in marriage as a lesson to her daughter. She does not suffer punishment, as one would expect in a nineteenth-century novel, for what is seen as “unmotherly” (343) behaviour by a society that demands submission and self-sacrifice from women. Instead, her extreme isolation: “None saw – none knew: there was no sympathy – no redemption – no redress” (341), is a judgement of a society indifferent to the suffering of women.

Mrs Pryor’s role as a female figure of knowledge and information for young women is already established via her role as Shirley’s governess. Shirley, for instance, responds to Mr Helstone’s offer to make her his “pupil in politics and religion” by saying that Mrs Pryor had “anticipated” (156) him by “drill[ing her] both in theology and history” (157). This conversation takes place during Mr Helstone and Caroline’s first visit to Shirley and it is thus in her role as Shirley’s governess that Caroline first meets Mrs Pryor. Another dimension of the re-evaluation of the representation of the mother-daughter relationship is introduced here. The mother is not simply recuperated as a mother and revealed to the daughter as such. Instead, Caroline first meets her mother as a *woman* and develops a relationship with her based on sympathy and an immediate compatibility: “She and this lady would, if alone, have at once got on extremely well together” (156). The daughter’s relationship with the mother is firstly, then, “a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity” (Irigaray 1991: 50) in which the mother represents for the daughter not only the maternal function as prescribed by patriarchy. The initial elimination of the mother from the text thus creates an opportunity for the development of a new kind of relationship such as that envisaged by Irigaray: “A woman would be directly in intersubjective relation with her mother. Her economy is that of the *between subjects*, and not that of the subject – object relation” (quoted in Whitford 1991: 45, emphasis in original). In her position as governess, Mrs Pryor also fulfils the role of surrogate mother to the orphaned Shirley and she therefore becomes, in the genealogy that the novel sets up, the maternal link between her two ‘daughters’ whose friendship the novel maps.

In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf suggests that the representation of women's friendships should in itself be an act of subterfuge. Mary Carmichael, she says, should "talk of something else, looking steadily out of the window" (1977: 81) if she is to

catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex.
(81)

In the chapter entitled "Shirley and Caroline" (Chapter XII) the need for this separate space is explicitly theorised and connected to women's relation to nature, which is in turn personified as female. Shirley's invitation to Caroline to take "a breezy walk over Nunnely Common" (Brontë 1983: 163) creates an opportunity for the two women to get to know each other. A discourse about nature allows them to do so: "The very first interchange of slight observations sufficed to give each an idea of what the other was" (164). They discover that they are "compatriots" (165) and that their temperaments "would suit" (166). When Caroline tells Shirley about "the ruins of a nunnery" (166) at the centre of Nunnwood, Shirley's immediate response is: "We will go – you and I alone, Caroline – to that wood" (166). This, in turn, is answered by Caroline's uncharacteristically self-confident offer of herself as "guide" (166):

I know all the pleasant spots: *I know* where we could get nuts in nutting time; *I know* where wild strawberries abound; *I know* certain lonely, quite untrodden glades, carpeted with strange mosses, some yellow as if gilded, some a sober grey, some gem-green. *I know* groups of trees that ravish the eye with their perfect, picture-like effects . . . Miss Keeldar, I could guide you. (166, emphasis added)

In this short paragraph Caroline's "I know" is repeated five times. This seems to suggest that, in this relationship, her familiarity with Nunnwood does establish her as "guide" (166) to Shirley whose connection to industry places

her, according to the structural and symbolic configuration of the novel, firmly within a male-dominated environment. Shirley, for instance, tells Robert Moore that her “father built the mill, when it was a perfectly solitary ravine” (185), and, as heir to the industrialisation thus set in motion by her father, one may argue that she is unavoidably compromised, even though she does, as I show below, identify with ‘Nature’ as a mother figure. Throughout the novel Caroline’s association with Nunnely district and its inhabitants such as the Reverend Mr Hall and his sister Margaret, and the spinsters, Miss Ainsley and Miss Mann, places her in what the novel constructs as a ‘feminine’ space that contrasts with the ‘masculine’ world of industry and commerce. Nunnwood represents the centre of the former space and, in the conversation between Caroline and Shirley, it is established as a place where women should avoid the company of “a third person . . . whose presence would spoil . . . our pleasure” (166). The “third person” referred to here is soon defined as masculine: “An excursion becomes quite a different thing when there are gentlemen of the party” (166). The “presence of gentlemen dispels the last charm” and makes women “forget Nature” who, in turn, “covers her vast calm brow with a dim veil, conceals her face, and withdraws the peaceful joy with which, if we had been content to worship her only, she would have filled our hearts.” (166).

The personification of nature as a female deity is a consistent theme in the novel and emerges particularly in the conversations between Caroline and Shirley. One notable example occurs later in the narrative when the two women, instead of entering the church for the evening service, remain outside because Shirley “must stay” to watch “Nature . . . at her evening prayers” (252). Shirley describes her vision of Nature as being “like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth” (252). Caroline’s interjection that Shirley’s Eve “is not Milton’s Eve”, introduces a discussion that can happen only, as Shirley suggests, “because we are alone: we may speak what we think” (252). Again a conversation between women is portrayed as potentially subversive. Milton, the patriarchal poet *par excellence*, is criticised for his inability to “see the first woman” because, instead, “[i]t was his cook that he saw” (252). Shirley

constructs an alternative mythology of Eve as “a woman-Titan” (253) who, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, “not only . . . brings forth a Prometheus, . . . [but] was herself a Prometheus, contending with Omnipotence and defying bondage” (1984: 194). In contrast to the patriarchal cosmology that portrays Adam as the father of all creation and which privileges the relationship between a male god and his male creation, Shirley’s Eve is portrayed as the mother of creation who “face to face . . . speaks to God” (253). This representation thus also contradicts the traditional portrayal of Eve as the cause of man’s fall from grace into sin. Shirley claims the vision of female creative power as “my mother Eve, in these days called Nature” (253).

Shirley’s “Titan visions” (254) construct an idealised mother figure similar to, but far more elaborately theorised than, Jane Eyre’s description of “the universal mother, Nature” (Brontë 1987a: 327) after she leaves Rochester and roams the moors around Whitcross. As orphans, both characters rely on what Meena Alexander, in *Women in Romanticism*, describes as a “Romantic model of a void left by maternal death, which nature alone could fill” (1989: 190). She argues that a male Romantic poet such as Wordsworth is “in his poetry . . . powerfully impelled not so much to recapture the lost mother” (114) but instead “to fortify the self in relation to her, to become a power like her” (Shapiro quoted in Alexander 1989: 114). He thus transfers this control to “maternal nature . . . [who] conveniently gives way to the expanding powers of [his] genius” (190).

In contrast to the matricide and appropriation played out by the male Romantic poet, the relationship between “maternal nature” and the woman poet/writer is informed by a sense of the earth as the body of the mother who provides, as we see in *Jane Eyre*, shelter for the orphaned daughter. Unlike the “culminating and procreative marriage between mind and nature” M. H. Abrams sees in Romanticism (quoted in Alexander 1989: 167), Alexander suggests that for the woman writer “there is a crossing back, at the brink of visionary revelation, to the realms of ordinary, bodily experience” (167). The conversation between Shirley and Caroline enacts this “crossing back” (167)

from what Caroline describes as Shirley's "vague and visionary" (Brontë 1983: 253) Eve to "the realms of ordinary, bodily experience" (Alexander 1989: 167) of Caroline's desire for her mother. Caroline appears to be unmoved by Shirley's passion which she counters with the prosaic reminder that Eve "coveted an apple and was cheated by a snake" (Brontë 1983: 253). Shirley's recuperation of Eve as a "mighty and mystical parent" (254) reminds Caroline specifically of her "own mother; unknown, unloved, but not unlonged for" (254):

The longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, and which fear of its fallacy had of late years almost extinguished, relit suddenly, and flowed warm in her heart: that her mother might come some happy day, and send for her to her presence – look upon her fondly with loving eyes, and say to her tenderly in a sweet voice – 'Caroline, my child I have a home for you: you shall live with me. All the love you have needed, and not tasted, from infancy, I have saved for you carefully. Come! it shall cherish you now'. (254)

Caroline's longing for her mother here and throughout the novel coincides with a longing for a "home" (254) which is, in turn, inextricably connected to her desperate search for "[her] place in the world" (138). Whereas Shirley transforms her absent mother into an abstract symbol to be worshipped, Caroline's desire for her mother is not mystical, but a perpetual physical longing for contact imagined as a homecoming. The difference between the two women is of course that Shirley is an orphan. For her the experience of maternal loss does not hold the same possibility of reunion with her mother as it does for Caroline whose mother is, as far as she knows, still alive. However, if one returns to the comparison made earlier between Shirley's and Jane Eyre's experiences of nature as maternal, the mother's death does not necessarily result in the kind of "visionary" (253) abstraction of the mother as sublime nature constructed in Shirley's myth. Jane Eyre's experience of "the universal mother, Nature" (Brontë 1987a: 327), even though it participates in the same metaphor, is personal and physical in the same way

that Caroline longs for a 'real' mother. For Jane nature is the "benign and good" (328) mother whose love is unconditional: "I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness" (328). Jane "nestle[s] to the breast of the hill" (329) as if it were the breast of her mother who "lodge[s] [her] without money and without price" (328). This description from *Jane Eyre* is similar to those found in the writing of Dorothy Wordsworth for whom, Meena Alexander suggests, "[m]aternity is identified with places that permit of being, with the earth itself as harbour" (1989: 121). Jane's sense of a threatening male presence that disturbs the daughter's peaceful communion with her 'mother', Nature, also recalls the way in which Caroline and Shirley perceive the presence of men as intrusive when women wish to spend time in or with nature.

In *Shirley* the "ruins of a nunnery" (Brontë 1983: 166) at the "heart" (165) of Nunnwood where the "very oldest of the trees" (166) grow, recall an historical moment when a separatist community of unmarried women lived outside the parameters of civil society. Although this community no longer exists, the traces of its existence, the "ruins" (166), remain as a reminder to women that prior to "Robin Hood" (165) and his band of men, an earlier society of women existed within the wood which is also named for them. The construction of this community as religious – i.e. Roman Catholic – does not necessarily participate in what Zlotnick describes as Brontë's "native anti-Catholicism" (1991: 287n).⁸ Zlotnick argues that in *Shirley* "the nun, representative of both a Catholic and a medieval world, becomes the ideal embodiment of the miserable lives women have led through history" (286n). This argument does however not take into account the novel's preoccupation with, and analysis of, the various ways in which the nineteenth-century novel represses the representation of women's homosocial relationships.

In this specific scene where Shirley and Caroline are in the process of establishing a friendship, the "ruins" (Brontë 1983: 166) of Nunnwood do not signify a place of repression and denial, but a desired space away from the intrusive presence of men. Paul Johnson's description of the "problem"

nunneries posed for the “English bishops” (1976: 239) presents an alternative view that is more relevant to the novel than the one articulated by Zlotnick, because it takes into account the role nunneries played as a place of retreat for “[w]idows and virgins from the upper classes [who] were put there for a variety of non-religious reasons, and did not see why they should sacrifice any of the comforts to which they were accustomed” (239). Thus, although some nunneries were undoubtedly strict and repressive, many provided sanctuary to women (even if they were “put there” (239) by their male relatives) who became strengthened by their community and “often defied bishops, even bishops backed up by the secular authorities” (239). Johnson describes one such instance of rebellion when nuns made their refusal to obey a papal disciplinary bull, delivered by the bishop of Lincoln to their nunnery, quite clear by throwing it at his head. A letter from William of Wykeham to the Abbess of Romsey in 1387 illustrates both the lifestyle of the nuns and the exasperation of the male authority figures of the church, who were clearly powerless to curb what they saw as rampant “indiscipline” (239). The scene he describes is hilarious, not only for its carnivalesque qualities, but also for the anxiety he obviously suffers as a result of this behaviour. He writes:

[W]e strictly forbid you all and several . . . that ye presume henceforth to bring to church no birds, hounds, rabbits or other frivolous things that promote indiscipline . . . through hunting dogs and other hounds abiding within your monastic precincts, the alms that should be given to the poor are devoured and the church and cloisters . . . foully defiled . . . and through their inordinate noises divine service is frequently troubled . . . we strictly command and enjoin you, Lady Abbess, to remove the dogs altogether. (Quoted in Johnson 1976: 239)

Johnson unfortunately perpetuates the stereotypical explanation of this ‘unruly’ behaviour when he writes: “Celibate upper-class women, living communally, and with little too little to occupy them, tended to become eccentric and very difficult to control” (239). According to this explanation, women without men are not only freed from their traditional domestic chores;

they also lack a focus for their sexual energy which, in turn, leads to chaos and eccentricity. The assumption here is, of course, that women without men are automatically “celibate” (239) because “[t]he interplay of desire among women’s bodies, sexes, and speech is inconceivable in the dominant socio-cultural economy” (Irigaray 1981b: 110). Pornographic representation of nunneries as licentious places where all manner of ‘perversion’ is enacted for the pleasure of the male reader, is simply the flipside of this view of female sexuality. Janet Todd, for instance, argues that “[i]n France erotic friendship, as in [Diderot’s] *The Nun*, most commonly appears in the fictional convent, the chosen place of much eighteenth-century pornography and the obsession of Catholic writers not only as a symbol of women’s suffering but also as a hotbed of female perversion and power” (1980: 421). Although female homosexuality is therefore imagined to exist, it is, as Irigaray suggests, “admitted only in as far as it is prostituted to the fantasies of men”:

Goods can only enter into relations under the surveillance of their ‘guardians’. It would be out of the question for them to go to the ‘market’ alone, to profit from their own value, to talk to each other, to desire each other, without the control of the selling-buying-consuming subjects. And their relations must be relations of rivalry in the interest of tradesmen. (1981b: 110)

These representations therefore constitute a violent attempt to control independent female sexuality that does not rely on the phallus for its pleasure and is not harnessed by patriarchy in service to procreation via marriage. The anxiety that a community of women generates is thus always, it seems, located in its potential challenge to what Irigaray calls the male “*hom(m)osexual*” economy:

The trade that organises patriarchal societies takes place exclusively among men. Women, signs, goods, currency, all pass from one man to another This signifies that the *very possibility of the socio-cultural order would necessitate homosexuality*. Homosexuality is the law that regulates the socio-cultural order. Heterosexuality amounts to the assignment of roles in the

economy: some are given the role of producing and exchanging subjects, while others are assigned the role of productive earth and goods. (107, emphasis in original)⁹

This economy, that trades women to cement the homosocial bonds between men, is challenged by an alternative “economy of abundance” that exists when women escape the trade between men and institute “among themselves ‘another’ kind of trade” (110).

The ruins of the nunnery at the centre of Nunnwood represent the potential for “a different form of social organisation and a different economy” (Whitford 1991: 181) that Irigaray envisages for women. As central to the discourse of friendship between women, the ruins within the wood serve as a possible foundation for a plot construction that inscribes female auto- and homoeroticism, and which thus defies the triangular enclosure of the Oedipal plot. The alternative plot of women’s friendship that Brontë constructs as a foil to the traditional heterosexual plot is, however, gradually but consistently displaced by the plotting towards marriage, and is, at novel’s end, obliterated by the double inscription of patriarchy and industry. Shirley and Caroline have been transformed by marriage into “Mrs Louis” and “Mrs Robert” (Brontë 1983: 511), and the Hollow, “which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild” (511), has been transformed into “the manufacturer’s day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes – the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage gardens . . . a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel” (511).

The pessimism that informs this closure – even if one were to concede that Brontë’s view of industrial progress is ambivalent rather than critical, as Susan Zlotnick suggests (1991) – results from the recognition that the counter-plot of female friendship, and the “different economy” (Whitford 1991: 181) it proposes, will inevitably fail to supersede the dominant plot of the nineteenth-century novel and its inscription of a hom(m)osexual economy. Brontë’s refusal to reassure her readers that “her heroines live happily ever after” (Zlotnick 1991: 294) clearly signals the emotional (and financial)

impoverishment that the marriage plot represents for women. She also cunningly shows how the forces of the marriage plot conspire to prevent Caroline and Shirley from acting out their fantasy of going into nature without men. The two women never visit Nunnwood and the ruins of the nunnery as they had planned to do. Neither do they travel together, as Shirley had envisaged, to “the Highlands” and “the North Atlantic, beyond the Shetland – perhaps to the Faroe Isles” (Brontë 1983: 191). It is, instead, Shirley’s future husband, Louis Moore, and Mr Hall, the vicar of Nunnely, “between whom a spontaneous intimacy seemed to have arisen” (374), who go “‘up north’ on a pedestrian excursion to the Lakes” (374). The displacement of female homosocial desire by the implied male homosocial bond signalled here coincides with the introduction of the active plotting towards Shirley’s marriage initiated by her uncle, whose “invasion” (307) of Fieldhead prevents Shirley and Caroline from starting on “that northern tour they had planned” (307). The possibility of female friendship anticipated in the earlier chapter named for the two friends, “Shirley and Caroline” (Chapter XII), is explicitly negated by the separation of the two women implied by the title of the chapter, “Two Lives” (Chapter XXII), in which the Sympson family descends on Fieldhead. Whereas Caroline will, from this point on, consider and negotiate the social implications of the single woman’s life, Shirley becomes enmeshed in the financial and marital negotiations that have always been in the background, but that now increase in intensity with the arrival of Mr Sympson and, of course, Louis Moore.

The male homosocial structures of support that maintain the hom(m)osexual economy and its view of women as objects for trade, expressed in the marriage plot, form an ever-present counterpoint to the plot of female friendship and the related mother-daughter plot. *Shirley* begins with a wry look at the gathering of greedy, misogynist curates who noisily outdo one another in insolence to the landlady serving their dinner. Mr Helstone interrupts their meal because he wants them to help Robert Moore, who “has resolved to have the new machinery” (9) and expects retaliation from the workers. Unlike

Sweeting, whose excuse is that his “mother wouldn't like it” (12), and Donne, who refuses to touch the pistols: “I never touch them . . . I never did touch anything of the kind” (12), Malone is eager to use the “loaded pistols in h[is] pockets” (5) and sets out to help Moore.

Malone finds Moore in his “castle” (17), the mill, where his independence from “the femininity of the cottage yonder” (17) is admired by Malone, who compliments him on his independence. Soon the two men settle into an easy domesticity, cooking mutton chops and brewing punch. One may easily applaud this arrangement as an improvement on the feast that had gone before, were it not for the misogyny that underlies most of their conversation. Contrary to expectation, the two men do not discuss the anticipated attack on Moore's mill and related matters of industry, but are, instead, engaged in a discussion of a quite different economy, that of marriage.

When Malone introduces himself to Moore as not “a lady's man”(15), he distinguishes himself from Sweeting, the curate of Nunnely, whom he defines in terms of his relationships with women – “the cavalier of the Misses Sykes, with the whole six of whom he is in love” (15) – and the feminisation that this seems to imply. Malone, in contrast, praises Moore for his freedom from “petticoat government” (19), and a bond of shared masculinity, implied by their mutual difference from Sweeting, is assumed. However, it is Sweeting's romantic affairs, and the economic viability of his marriage to one of the Miss Sykes, that remain the topic of this ‘masculine’ conversation. The conversation also illustrates Malone's view of marriage as purely a matter of business:

If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage: I mean marriage in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment; two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling – humbug! But an advantageous connection, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views, and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad – eh? (16)

In keeping with this pragmatic approach, Malone subsequently shifts his attention from Caroline to Shirley and “the pursuit of the lesser fortune was

openly relinquished for that of the greater" (219). In a scene that brilliantly illustrates Brontë's ability to use humour as a tool to deflate the masculine self-importance exemplified by Malone (and which I quote in full because it is such a delightful example of Brontë's frequently ignored sense of humour), Caroline and Shirley's laughter represents a moment of female strength and solidarity in the face of male "calculations and tactics" (219):

At last, finding it desirable to add ease to his charms, he drew forth to aid him an ample silk pocket-handkerchief. This was to be the graceful toy with which his unoccupied hands were to trifle. He went to work with a certain energy: he folded the red and yellow square cornerwise; he whipped it open with a waft: again he folded it in narrower compass: he made of it a handsome band. To what purpose would he proceed to apply the ligature? Would he wrap it about his throat – his head? Should it be a comforter or a turban? Neither. Peter Augustus had an inventive – an original genius: he was about to show the ladies graces of action possessing at least the charm of novelty. He sat on the chair with his athletic Irish legs crossed, and these legs, in that attitude, he circled with the bandanna and bound firmly together. It was evident he felt this device to be worth an encore: he repeated it more than once. The second performance sent Shirley to the window to laugh her silent but irrepressible laugh unseen: it turned Caroline's head aside, that her long curls might screen the smile mantling on her features. (219)¹⁰

Malone's ridiculous performance in this scene is used to textually subvert precisely the institutionalised misogyny he spouts, and Caroline and Shirley's response here is an enactment of Elizabeth Grosz's argument that "the best strategy for challenging the phallic authority of the penis is *laughter*" (1990: 187).¹¹ Malone could be seen as Brontë's construction of a recognisable character-type that provides the kind of amusement for the woman reader that the spinster-figure would ordinarily represent for the unsympathetic male reader. Annis Pratt, for instance, argues that, for women readers, "a scene in which two women outwit a chauvinist idiot is just as titillating as scene of the profoundest eroticism" (1981: 96). Whereas Malone

is deflated by humour, his colleague Donne, who never doubts that *he* will become “master of Fieldhead” (Brontë 1983: 220), deserves only contempt. He is rude and crass, and attempts to disguise his lack of courage, when Shirley's dog chases him, by calling her femininity into question. He tells her to hang her dog and to buy, instead, “some sweetly pooty pug or poodle: something appropriate to the fair sex: ladies generally like lapdogs” (220). Malone and Donne are shown to be mercenary in their pursuit of wealth, unlike Sweeting with his romantic fidelity to his sweetheart.

The novel interrogates the kind of economy that, apart from exploiting women, corrupts the minds of men who subscribe to its tenets and who become contemptible because of their greed. Moore's opinion (undoubtedly shared by the masculine community of the novel) that women are obsessed with marriage – “I believe women talk and think only of these things, and they naturally fancy men's minds similarly occupied” (18) – is contradicted by his own eager participation in marital transactions involving, not Shirley, but her wealth. When he thinks of marriage to her, he does so in purely financial terms: “I should be rich with her, and ruined without her” (419). Shirley's response to his marriage proposal – “You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse, rather than like a lover who asked my heart” (420) – supports the text's implicit criticism of Moore's position here. His shift of interest from Caroline to Shirley duplicates that of Malone, and the text obviously censures him through this parallel. Moore, and the opinions he expresses as representative of the male community or patriarchy, is further discredited because the text shows that it is not the women, but the men, who spend most of their time negotiating and planning suitable marriages.¹²

Mr Sympson is a prime example of this intense preoccupation with marriage. He is in a state of almost perpetual agitation about Shirley's suitors and her indifference to them. In another humorous dislocation of stereotypes, Shirley castigates her uncle for his “old woman's cackle” (437) when he is outraged at the possibility of her marriage to Robert Moore whom he considers to be merely her “bankrupt tenant” and also “a foreigner” (437). However, Mr

Sympson does not have the power to compel Shirley to marry anyone whom she does not wish to marry. Shirley's power resides in her legal status as single woman, who is no longer a minor, and who therefore has complete control of her inherited estate, Fieldhead: "[a] property of a thousand years belonged to it; which property had descended for lack of male heirs, on a female" (155).

Mr Sympson's attempts "to have his niece married" (369) are thwarted because he lacks the legal power to force her to marry against her will. He expresses his despair by blaming the legal system: "Why are not the laws more stringent, that I might compel her to hear reason?" (371) He has, however, lost the power he had as her guardian, as she reminds him, and he can no longer rightfully play the role of her surrogate father – a right he asserts when he demands to read a letter she had received from Sir Philip Nunnely, one of the suitors she had rejected. It was indeed this potential alliance with Sir Philip that caused Mr Sympson to anticipate, in the role of father, the full enjoyment of the business of trading Shirley in marriage. He impatiently awaits the time "when the matter should be opened in form; when himself should be consulted; when lawyers would be summoned; when settlements discussions, and all the delicious worldly fuss, should pompously begin" (430). A surprising feature of Mr Sympson's preoccupation with marriage is his failure to snap up Shirley's rejected suitors for his own daughters, for not once in the text does he attempt to get them married. His obsession with Shirley's estate could explain this negligence, but what exactly does Mr Sympson stand to gain in negotiating a marriage for his niece?

Perhaps the fantasy he has of the reflected glory of Shirley's marriage to Sir Philip partly explains the benefits he sees in *his* familial bond with Shirley's husband: "his prophetic soul anticipated a splendid future: he already scented the time far off when, with nonchalant air, and left foot nursed on his right knee, he should be able to make dashingly-familiar allusions to his 'nephew the baronet'" (373). Ironically, his children stand to gain far more from their familial bond with Shirley as a *single* woman, as we see when Mr Sympson's only son

and heir, the “little, lame, and pale” (393) Henry, tells Louis Moore, his tutor, about the will Shirley had drawn up (a right she will forfeit when she marries). In the will she leaves Fieldhead to Henry and, “because [his] sisters will have nothing” she “left them some money” (393).

Marriage will result in an automatic transference of Shirley’s property to her husband who will then have the right to dispose of it, both before and after her death, as he sees fit.¹³ Shirley’s will here represents the subversive power of the single woman who owns property because it disrupts the automatic transference of property to the nearest male relative and it also stipulates that money should be given to daughters who generally receive “nothing” (393). The gift of money to women – a gift that extends to Caroline Helstone who is also mentioned in the will – liberates them from having to marry for money. This disrupts the control that the father has over his daughters. Yet these challenges to patriarchal authority are nothing compared to Shirley’s ‘bargain’ with Mr Sympson’s son and heir of whom she asks, as he explains,

that if I lived to inherit my father’s estate, and her house, I was to take the name of Keeldar, and to make Fieldhead my residence. Henry Shirley Keeldar I said I would be called: and I will. Her name and her manor-house are ages old, and Sympson and Sympson Grove are of yesterday. (395)

These plans do of course not materialise because Shirley does not die as a result of the dog bite, as she had feared she would. Their presence in the text nonetheless illustrates the kind of threat Shirley, as a wealthy single female heir to an old family name, poses to the smooth running of patriarchal structures of control. Shirley’s containment at the end of the novel does not contradict the eagerness with which Henry Sympson is willing to discard his father’s name to assume hers – a name which was also his mother’s ‘maiden’ name.

Issues of name, family and kinship are central to the conflict between Shirley and Mr Sympson and are manipulated by the latter to induce guilt and a sense of indebtedness in Shirley. The emotional manipulation that underlies

this dynamic is evident in his accusation that her failure to adhere to his choice of husband shows her to be “ungrateful” after he had been a “parent” to her and raised her as his “own daughter” (432). This strategy fails utterly because Shirley consistently rejects the father-daughter bond he tries to establish and maintain. When he hints darkly at rumours about her and “dare[s] [Shirley] to sully [their] name by a *mésalliance*”, she responds with an outright rejection of kinship: “*Our name! Am I called Sympson?*” (437). Similarly, during the argument resulting from Shirley’s rejection of Sir Philip, Mr Sympson threatens that his “family respectability shall not be compromised” (437) by Shirley’s behaviour. She retaliates by rejecting any familial bonds, saying that she “form[s] no part of [his] family” (437). When he asks whether she “disowns” them, she replies that she “disdains [his] dictatorship” (437). There are interesting parallels to be drawn between this passionate rejection of family ties when they bind and chafe, and the eight-year-old Jane Eyre’s rejection of kinship to her aunt and cousins because of their neglect of and cruelty to her. Whereas Jane’s assertion of individuality signifies the start of her journey towards becoming an heir, Shirley’s altercation with her uncle is part of a process in which she will eventually lose the freedom and power she has here because she will eventually marry Louis Moore.

Mr Sympson is wounded by Shirley’s attitude towards him in the same way that Donne is when Shirley’s dog attacks him. Both men retaliate by attacking her femininity because her status as heir to a large estate, exaggerated by her frequent assumption of a male persona, “Captain Keeldar”, challenges the structures that are established to maintain power as male. Thus Mr Sympson takes refuge in calling her “unwomanly” (370) and accuses her of using “[u]nladylike language” (371). He eventually labels her as “not proper” and therefore not fit to “associate” (439) with his daughters, clearly because he fears Shirley’s influence as potentially disruptive of the power he has over his daughters.

Shirley’s position as heir elicits a similar response from Mr Yorke. However, unlike Mr Sympson who sees Moore as a most unsuitable suitor, Mr

Yorke promotes the marriage between Shirley and Robert Moore, whom he describes as a “gentleman” whose “blood is pure and ancient” (293). Mr Yorke’s investment in the marriage is, nonetheless, as much motivated by self-interest and a concern for the re-establishment of the patriarchal status quo as Mr Sympson’s is. Mr Yorke had lost a great deal of money as a result of business dealings with Moore’s father, whose marriage to the daughter of a partner in his firm, “with the prospect of his bride inheriting her father Constantine Gérard’s share in the business”, turns out to be merely an inheritance of “his share in the liabilities of the firm” (20). Mr Yorke sets out to help Robert Moore by using his position as Shirley’s guardian to secure Moore’s tenure of the textile mill – Shirley is at this point still “a minor” (20). These business interests coincide with a feeling of friendship for, and even romantic attraction to, Robert Moore. We are, for instance, told that it is Moore’s foreignness that Yorke finds attractive: “Moore spoke English with a foreign, and French with a perfectly pure, accent; and that his dark, thin face, with its fine though rather wasted lines, had a most anti-British and anti-Yorkshire look”, and that this reminds Yorke of “his travelling, his youthful days” (38).

The triangular relationship that is constructed through Yorke’s affiliation to Robert Moore illustrates how the bonds between men supersede all other bonds in this social world. Here, Mr Yorke’s responsibility to guard Shirley’s interests is negated by his obvious promotion of Robert’s Moore’s because he persistently encourages Moore to propose to Shirley. As her guardian, Yorke speaks for Shirley in her business dealings with Moore, her tenant, negotiating on her behalf. This process of silencing the female member in the triangular relationship is simply continued when she herself becomes the property negotiated for. Yorke automatically assumes the role of surrogate father, as someone with a stake in Shirley’s fortune and future, when he plans to marry her to Robert Moore. For him she is “the first prize” of “twenty thousand pounds” handed by “Fortune” to Robert Moore (416). It is Yorke’s intention to rectify the double disruption of the hom(m)osexual economy that had occurred

when, firstly, Moore's father's marriage speculation had gone wrong, and, secondly, when a woman, Shirley, had inherited Fieldhead. By plotting the marriage between Robert Moore, who had been disenfranchised as a result of his father's business failure, and Shirley, Yorke seeks to rectify the disruption of gender power relations caused by Shirley's authority as landowner and "saviour" (187) of Robert Moore who is her tenant and debtor.

In order to foreground the danger for women who are drawn into the type of triangulation Yorke sets up, the Yorke-Shirley-Moore triangle is represented as a parallel to the Yorke-Mary Cave-Helstone triangle. Yorke's love for Mary Cave, "a girl of living marble" and "a monumental angel" (39), is thwarted because she chooses to marry Helstone, Caroline's uncle. When Mary dies two years after the wedding, and rumour circulates that she had been neglected by her husband, Yorke "conceived for that other [Helstone] a rooted and bitter animosity" (40). Helstone, however, explains Yorke's animosity as the result of "political and religious differences" (40). Even though Yorke is married, and the object of his desire dead, his intense hatred of Helstone forms a far stronger and more enduring bond than does his relationships with women. The intensity of Yorke's hatred here illustrates René Girard's contention in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* that "the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (Sedgwick 1985: 21). Mary Cave's insignificance in the triangular relationship is, in fact, the "dark truth" (Brontë 1983: 426) Yorke tells Moore when Moore confesses the failure of his marriage proposal to Shirley: "the odds are, if Mary had loved and not scorned me; if I had been secure of her affection, certain of her constancy, been irritated by no doubts, stung by no humiliations – the odds are . . . I should have left her" (426).

Mary Cave's passivity and silence represent the extreme negation of self demanded by an economy that constructs women as property and which, as a result, controls their sexuality as a matter of course. Her name resonates with the duality ascribed to women, because she is at once Virgin *Mary*, angelic and

chaste, and she is also a cave, a womb, a sexual being associated with birth. However, in this economy, she remains the empty cave through which desire between men passes. After two years of marriage to Helstone, whose views on women and marriage are amongst the harshest in the novel, Mary Cave, “stillness personified” with “the face of a Madonna” (39), is nothing but “a still beautiful-featured mould of clay . . . cold and white in the conjugal couch” (40). In death, Mary Cave remains fixed in stasis like “marble” and becomes, in fact, the “monumental angel” (39) to which she had been compared. She represents the empty, silent space in the text where female sexuality is unspoken and yet, paradoxically, *spoken for* in the discourse between men.

In her excess of silence and passivity, Mary Cave recalls the contrasting excesses of the madly laughing Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Both characters represent the silencing and containment of female sexuality by an economy based on “women’s relegation to the role of commodities and objects” (Grosz 1990: 175). Whereas Bertha’s violence enacts a refusal to be silenced and contained, Mary’s disappearance into silence enacts an alternative, no less significant, form of rebellion. Yet for both characters death is, eventually, the only real form of escape.

This erasure from the text threatens both Shirley and Caroline as the narrative moves towards the inevitable closure of their stories in marriage. Caroline seems to be the one more obviously at risk here because she not only looks like Mary Cave, her aunt, she also takes her place in the Helstone home as surrogate wife and housekeeper, and follows an apparently similar course of decline and disappearance. Yet the obviousness of this genealogy obscures the real kinship at stake here, for even though Caroline may be related to Mary by marriage, it is Shirley who is related to Mary by blood: Hiram Yorke calls Shirley “the daughter and heiress of the late Charles Cave Keeldar” (Brontë 1983: 293, emphasis added). As a potential mother figure linking Shirley and Caroline as symbolic sisters, Mary Cave is constructed as the opposite of Mrs Pryor, who is developed into a positive mother figure for both Shirley and Caroline because she rejects the passivity and silence imposed by marriage.

Yet it is Caroline alone who diverges from the marriage plot to participate in the mother-daughter plot with Mrs Pryor, whilst Shirley becomes increasingly more involved in marriage negotiations that separate her from both Caroline and Mrs Pryor.

The "Two Lives" chapter referred to above illustrates how Caroline, a single woman without prospect of marriage or significant inheritance, needs to actively participate in the construction of alternative plots for her story. She is never subjected to the conspicuous marriage speculation by the male characters in the text that Shirley has to resist because she lacks Shirley's wealth and social status. The assertion of control over her independence is a far more subtle assault. Her uncle, who has no investment in plotting her marriage, actively dissuades her from marrying by saying that "[i]t is decidedly the wisest plan to remain single, especially for women" (78). Since he is also the only patriarchal authority figure in the text who does not participate in arranging a marriage for Shirley, one may be tempted to see him as a man chastened by his wife's untimely death. However, Helstone's misogyny informs all his relationships with women:

At heart, he could not abide sense in women: he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible: because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be, – inferior toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away. (91)

Both Caroline and Shirley are evidently women of some "sense", and do not conform to these requirements at all, yet it is Caroline who becomes Helstone's designated scapegoat, "it being only with the one lady of his own family that he maintained a grim taciturnity" (91). Whereas he allows Shirley her independence, however grudgingly, because she is "neither [his] wife nor [his] daughter" (214), Caroline is treated as his property because she functions as a useful daughter, and even a surrogate wife, in his home. It is therefore apparent that his anti-marriage stance is self-serving and controlling, and not intended to protect Caroline – as Mrs Pryor's views are. Helstone's sense of

ownership is easily threatened as his response to the relationship between Robert Moore and Caroline shows. He is so “annoyed” (135) after seeing Robert and Caroline’s “eyes meet once – only once” (134) that he “fixed his resolution of separating the cousins” (135) and forbids Caroline to have any contact with the Moores. The text makes the innocence of the glance quite clear: “there was nothing then of craft and concealment to offend” (133), and it shows Helstone’s excessive response to be inappropriate and suspicious:

If you had asked him what Moore merited at that moment, he would have said ‘a horsewhip’; if you had inquired into Caroline’s deserts, he would have adjudged her a box on the ear; if you had further demanded the reason of such chastisements, he would have stormed against flirtation and love-making, and vowed he would have no such folly going on under his roof. (135)

Whether one reads this as an expression of ‘fatherly’ possessiveness and jealousy, or as an attempt to keep Caroline in her allotted place, serving him, Helstone’s disruption of the bond between Caroline and Robert constitutes an act of triangulation and control. His participation in the triangle with Yorke and Mary Cave is recalled by the “political reasons” (135) he gives to explain his separation of Caroline and Moore: “I do not approve of the principles of the family: they are Jacobinical” (135). He had used a similar explanation, “political and religious differences” (140), to explain Yorke’s animosity. Robert’s schoolboyish delight in hiding from Helstone in the garden when he walks Caroline home from Fieldhead one night indicates the shift that takes place because of Helstone’s intervention. The reference to Helstone’s treatment of “Fanny’s sweetheart” (202) in a similar situation, foregrounds the romantic potential of this situation, whilst at the same time undercutting it in the ironic shift of Robert’s focus from Caroline to Helstone.¹⁴

It is within these parameters that Caroline has to define herself as a single woman, thus becoming the questioning feminist voice of the text. The loss she suffers is not merely that of a future husband, but also, perhaps even more importantly, a loss of family and home. She clearly feels more at home

with her cousins at Hollow Cottage than she does at her uncle's house. Here she not only learns French from Hortense, but is also a teacher to Robert when they, for instance, read Shakespeare together – an interesting reversal of the Shirley-Louis relationship in which Louis is situated in the traditional male role of teacher to the younger Shirley. One is reminded of Jane Eyre's similar position with her Rivers cousins, and how that particular household was also, like this one, the locus of a desired eccentricity. Caroline, although she enters into a process of social analysis as a result of her unrequited love for Moore, and the disappointment of her dreams of marriage to him, is not constructed as a passive victim of this loss. She emerges instead as an intelligent social critic and feminist theorist. Her ambivalence towards and sharp criticism of most of the roles available to single women elaborate on Jane Eyre's similar concerns, expressed on the ramparts at Thornfield. Yet Jane's status, at this point in her journey of self-realisation, is that of a qualified governess who is bored with the quiet domestic life and hungers for passion and excitement. Caroline has no idea what to do with her life and questions the society that makes her a dependent and which, at the same time, discriminates against single women. She delivers an incisive analysis of the system that raises daughters with the sole aim of marriage, without preparing them for any other life:

Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood: the Armitages, the Birtwistles, the Sykes. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish – the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them: they hold them very cheap: they say – I have heard them say with sneering laughs

many a time – the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so, and are angry with their daughters when they observe their manoeuvres: they order them to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? If you ask, – they would answer, sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew. Can men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And, when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches at its slightest manifestation, would not their weariness ferment in time to frenzy? (310)¹⁵

Earlier in the novel, in the chapter named for its concern with “Old Maids”, Caroline (who is faced for the first time with the possibility of a single life) recognises that the philosophy of forbearance and patient ministering to others' needs preached to single women, serves only those who preach it. She questions the adequacy of “praise” as a reward: “Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow on it? I suspect there is” (138). There is very little meekness in these passages, and rather more of a reasonable opposition to confinement in the “narrow chamber” (137) of true womanhood. In fact, Caroline rejects the good Lucretia as a worthy example to follow, and singles out “Soloman's virtuous woman” who was “a manufacturer – she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist – she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what the matrons around here call ‘a clever woman’” (311, emphasis in original).

It is the lack of occupation and opportunity Caroline rejects, and the value-system of the “matrimonial market” (311) where men are the buyers, women the surplus products “educated” for this purpose. This system turns women into flirts and coquettes who either die of “consumption or decline” if they fail in their efforts, or become “sour old maids – envious, backbiting, wretched” (311). As commodities, women's market value is judged by “gentlemen [who] think only of ladies' looks” (140). Beauty thus becomes a

powerful signifier in the discourse of marriage as becomes apparent when we look at the description of the spinsters in the novel. Miss Mann's "ugliness" is likened to that of "Medusa" by Robert Moore (142 – 3). Miss Ainsley is declared "hideous" by "lively young gentlemen, and inconsiderate old ones" (144). The text could therefore be seen to subscribe precisely to the stereotype, if it were not for the obvious potential of Caroline, a pretty girl whose maid tells her that "there are no signs of an old maid about you" (140), becoming one. Furthermore, it is Caroline's inquiry into spinsterhood that exposes the stereotype as a creation of the male controlled economy in which marriage is the measure of women's worth.

Her visits to Miss Mann and Miss Ainsley, instigated by Fanny, her housemaid, cross the threshold of physical appearance and contradict the notion that spinsters are bitter because they are not married. Miss Mann's "moroseness" is the result of a lingering illness due to her role as "a most devoted daughter and sister, an unwearied watcher by lingering deathbeds" (143) whose "large sacrifices of time, money, health" had been repaid by "ingratitude" (142). These sacrifices occur within the private, even secret, world of the family where this kind of self-denial is demanded and not deemed worthy of reward, and thus not made known in the larger community. Miss Ainsley, who is even uglier and poorer than Miss Mann, assumes the same self-sacrificial role, but is neither ill nor unhappy because her voluntary service to the poor of the district is amply rewarded with friendship, loyalty and recognition. It is specifically "all the female neighbourhood" (144) that knows of her good deeds, and "[m]any ladies . . . respected her deeply", but "one gentleman – only one – gave her his friendship and perfect confidence: this was Mr Hall, the vicar of Nunnely" (145).

A chain of events unfolds within this chapter that suggests a female homosocial support system that is very different from the male structures of support analysed earlier. It starts with the concern of a working class woman (Fanny) for her mistress (Caroline) that leads the mistress to visit two unmarried gentlewomen, one of whom (Miss Ainsley) suggests that she assists

“certain poor women who had many children, and who were unskilled in using the needle for themselves” (146).¹⁶ It is of course part of the repertoire of most Victorian heroines to visit the poor and the sick routinely, and there is nothing profoundly subversive in Miss Ainsley's charity work. However, the cycle of help and concern across class barriers that emerges here is an explicit antithesis of the support that comes into play when the ‘masters’ band together to protect the source of capital against the workers. Whereas male relations across class are largely hostile and expressed in violent and abusive group confrontations about access to power, the relationships between women from different classes, notably *single* middle-class women and working-class women, are constructed (perhaps naively) as rooted in charity and the sharing of limited resources.

Caroline's experience of ‘woman's work’ as inadequate intellectual stimulation, leading to physical and psychological disease, nevertheless foregrounds the way in which middle-class women's passive submission to the status quo perpetuates a socio-economic system that exploits both themselves and the working-class women they try to help. Caroline's dissatisfaction with the gendered division of labour is evident long before the break-up with Moore. In the first conversation between her and Moore, Caroline expresses dissatisfaction with “making no money – earning nothing” (54). Her desire for “an occupation” is expressed to him in a fantasy of apprenticeship to the cloth-trade: “I could learn it of you, as we are distant relations. I would do the counting-house work, keep the books, and write the letters, while you went to market” (55). However, because she is a woman, Caroline is automatically excluded from a profession that will be intellectually stimulating and secure her financial independence at the same time.

It is precisely the lack of intellectual stimulation that thwarts Caroline's almost manic attempts to suppress with intense activity the “anguish” (146) she feels: “Never had she been seen so busy, so studious . . . so active” (147). The charity work and the house work, the traditional woman's work in short, leaves her mind unoccupied, and her pain is described as a spiritual and

intellectual winter, her "mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation" (147). This winter ends only when Caroline is reunited with her mother, Mrs Pryor, in what resembles the reunion of daughter and mother in the Kore/Persephone-Demeter myth. In *Shirley*, however, it is the daughter's experience of mother-loss, rather than the mother's mourning for the loss of her daughter that is represented as winter.

Whereas Shirley enters the text as a wealthy, independent woman and follows a gradual process of decline, Caroline fluctuates between strength and debility until she operates from a position of inner stability that Shirley lacks. The contrast between the two women interrogates the reader's assumption that Shirley, because the novel is named for her, represents the feminist locus of the text, and that Caroline is "only a feeble chick" (158), as her uncle, for instance, sees her. Why, when the novel's intense preoccupation with the position of women in society is consistently articulated through Caroline's experiences, does Brontë name the novel for *only* Shirley? It seems unlikely that Brontë's desire to create a fictional portrait of her sister, Emily, under more ideal circumstances, can alone account for her choice of eponym and the exclusion of Caroline from the title of the novel. It seems, rather, that Brontë here again resorts to a form of camouflage similar to that suggested by the speaker in Emily Dickinson's poem, because she "[t]ell[s] all the Truth but tell[s] it slant" (1975: 506). Shirley's beauty, charm and wealth situate her as the romantic heroine in a narrative that introduces itself as anti-romantic. The narrator warns the reader, on the first page of the novel, not to expect "anything like a romance", because "[s]omething real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning" (Brontë 1983:1). This warning appears to suggest that the elements of romance introduced in the novel – notably the double wedding at novel's end – are there to be read as "unromantic" since they serve primarily to reinforce patriarchal control and the enclosure and silencing of women.

It is as if the third-person narrator in *Shirley*, like Lucy Snowe, the first-person narrator in *Villette*, addresses the reader's expectations, which have

been shaped by the conventions of romantic fiction, only to subvert and deconstruct them. Thus Shirley, as representative of the romantic heroine whose beauty and wealth assure her the husband of her choice, is shown to be utterly domesticated by her relationship with Louis Moore, handing over all control of her property to him even before their marriage, “[s]he abdicated without a word or a struggle” (504). Yet Shirley’s resistance to this process of domestication is constructed as a painful *internal* “struggle” against the loss of autonomy demanded by the romantic plot. In contrast to the conventional representation of the bride-to-be’s resistance as an erotic game – Jane Eyre’s withdrawal from Rochester’s amorous attentions subsequent to his proposal may serve as an example – Shirley’s lack of interest in the marriage plans, “[s]he furthered no preparations for her nuptials” (504), and her attempts to postpone the wedding, “putting off her marriage day by day, week by week, month by month” (504), suggest a desperate attempt to escape from the metaphors of captivity and enslavement that construct her relationship with Louis Moore.

It is Louis who, in his diary – which more and more frequently intrudes into and dominates the narrative, first introduces the love relationship he desires as one in which he is “in the charge of a young lioness or leopardess” (413). Like his brother had done on a previous occasion, Louis here compares Caroline and Shirley. He, however, expresses a preference for the challenge Shirley presents: his “patience would exult in stilling the flutterings and training the energies of the restless merlin. In managing the wild instincts of the scarce manageable ‘bête fauve’, [his] powers would revel” (413). In his fantasies of subordination and control, Louis’ language consistently constructs Shirley as an untamed animal who “must be bent” and “curbed” (413). He represents her withdrawal into a near-catatonic state prior to her marriage – Caroline tells Robert that “[s]he will neither say Yes nor No to any question put” and “sits alone”, she is “queer and crazed” (505) – in language that celebrates, rather than expresses pity for, the suffering he sees when he “resolved to get a full look down her deep, dark eyes” (497). What he “read[s] there” is described in

an intensely violent metaphor which represents Shirley as a trapped animal: "Phanteress! – beautiful forest-born! – wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods, and pinings after virgin freedom" (497).

The co-existence of violence and desire in this image of woman as a beautiful, wild animal, crazed by her loss of freedom, recalls Rochester's descriptions of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Although Louis still sees Shirley as beautiful and desirable, unlike Rochester who feels only disgust for Bertha, the violence of this metaphor suggests a perhaps similar fate awaiting Shirley after years of marriage to Louis. His inability to feel compassion for her coincides with his representation of himself as a romantic lover who is "tantalised – sometimes tortured" (497) by Shirley's withdrawal, reading her pain as an erotic challenge. Louis' impatience for ownership of Fieldhead and of Shirley – "How long will it be before I can call that place my home, and its mistress mine?" (497) – illustrates how the discourse of romance disguises the discourse of commerce in which women are conflated with (their) property. In constructing the woman as "nature" (497) to be tamed and owned, the discourse of romance used by Louis also mirrors the discourse of colonialism, which constructs nature as female, penetrated and conquered by the male explorer.

This metaphor is central to the male-authored romance, and its silencing of the female subject is enacted in *Shirley* by the colonisation of the third-person narrative, and its plot of female genealogy and friendship, by Louis' first-person narrative. Louis' control over Shirley is represented as a control over her voice, which disappears from the third-person narrative and is absorbed into his diary as *his* voice gains ascendancy. She becomes a character in *his* story and, according to his version of this exchange, participates in the metaphor he has constructed when she says: "I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose" (492). The danger of this position is obvious and Shirley's passive surrender of power to Louis, following

as it does on her demand for a relationship in which they are “equal at last” (492), exposes the fundamental inequality to which she consents when marrying Louis. In order to establish a relationship of equality, she has to relinquish her own power and becomes, in fact, a “bondswoman” (477), as Caroline describes her when telling Robert Moore about Shirley’s love for Louis.

The metaphors of slavery Caroline introduces here – supported by Robert’s description of Caroline and Shirley as “fellow-slave[s]” (477) – is coincidental with her adoption of Louis’ metaphor when she describes Shirley as a “[l]ioness [who] has found her captor” (477). The colonisation of narrative space by Louis’ diary, and the metaphors he uses, are especially significant in their displacement of the discourse of female friendship between Shirley and Caroline in which nature represents an uncolonised space where women can talk to one another without the presence of men. The disintegration of female friendship is signalled when the last intimate exchange between Shirley and Caroline as single women is represented as a secret Caroline shares with Robert. Her act of disloyalty to Shirley, who trustingly reveals “[h]er heart’s core” (475) to Caroline, reconfigures the triangular relationship to re-establish Caroline’s loyalty to Robert, who has, as Shirley points out on a number of occasions, a disruptive influence on the women’s friendship.

From the start, Robert’s presence figures as a threat to the relationship because it situates Caroline and Shirley as rivals for his love. Whereas Caroline withdraws from friendship with Shirley because she thinks Shirley is in love with Robert and that he reciprocates this love, Shirley recognises the divisiveness of this triangular configuration very early in the friendship, calling him “the Troubler” (207). Instead of participating in the rivalry thus set up, Shirley confronts Caroline with the influence Robert exerts: “He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends: but that six feet of puppy-hood makes a perpetually-recurring eclipse of our friendship” (206). In the counter-triangle Shirley constructs, Caroline is figured as the prize, and Robert situated as the rival whom Shirley wants to shoot because she is

“desperately irritated” (205) by his intrusion.

At this early stage of the novel, the friendship does survive, “in spite of the black eclipse” (207), and Caroline’s confession of sisterly affection suggests a victory over rivalry:

Shirley, I never had a sister – you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other. Affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed: affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. Love hurts us so, Shirley: it is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame; in affection is no pain and no fire, only sustenance and balm. I am supported and soothed when you – that is, *you only* – are near, Shirley. (207, emphasis in original)

However, Caroline’s metaphor of sisterhood as a resilient plant and heterosexual love as a destructive fire anticipates the ultimate failure of female friendship in the novel. Although the narrative attempts to construct a sisterly relationship between the two women by proposing a female genealogy via Mrs Pryor and Mary Cave, the relationship that is eventually achieved confirms the authority of patriarchy because Caroline and Shirley become *sisters-in-law* when they marry the Moore brothers.

Does this closure then negate the feminist impulse that drives *Shirley*? In its representation of women’s place in nineteenth-century society and fiction, it is also, like Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, a critique of the patriarchal structures of control that limit and thwart those women. Instead of merely conforming to the structural imperative of the Victorian novel’s closure in marriage, Brontë’s novel exposes its fundamental negation of female homosocial relationships. *Shirley* presents a double challenge to the plot of marriage and its privileging of male homosocial bonds by introducing two alternative plots, the mother-daughter plot and the plot of female friendship, which re-inscribe female homosocial relationships into the narrative structure of the Victorian novel. However, although the mother-daughter bond between

Mrs Pryor and Caroline endures, it does not automatically secure the bond between Caroline and Shirley. *Shirley's* closure therefore illustrates that the mother-daughter plot can successfully co-exist with the plot of heterosexual marriage. The plot of female friendship is, however, displaced by the marriage plot, because it silences the expression of female desire and colonises the spaces where women can speak to each other alone.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ Charlotte Brontë's relationship with Lewes was complicated by her belief that he physically resembled Emily. In a letter to Ellen Nussey, she writes: "the aspect of Lewes' face almost moves me to tears – it is so wonderfully like Emily. . . whatever Lewes does or says I believe I cannot hate him" (Wise and Symington 1932: III 118). Her sense of betrayal at his review of *Shirley*, a novel painfully associated with Emily, is apparent in her letter to him: "I can be on my guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!" (quoted in Hook 1985: 10)

² Rich borrows the term "matrophobia" from the poet Lynn Sukenick.

³ For a more complete discussion of the construction of *Orlando* as a lesbian "love letter", see: Elizabeth Meese, "When Virginia looked at Vita, what did she see; or lesbian: feminist: woman – what is the differ(e/a)nce?" (1997), and Karen R. Lawrence, "Woolf's Voyages Out: *The Voyage Out* and *Orlando*" (1994).

⁴ Gilbert and Gubar present a similar argument in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*: "When this generic incongruity results in a loss of artistic fusion, as Lewes complained, we can see from our vantage point that the pain of female confinement is not merely [Brontë's] subject in *Shirley*, it is a measure or aspect of her artistry" (1984: 373).

⁵ In the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë's frustration with the literary double standard is apparent when she writes:

All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman to read, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man. (1985: 31)

⁶ Auerbach argues that Gaskell's "powerful obsession with the Brontë sisters as they appeared in her imagination" emerges in *Cranford* "before a biography proper seemed conceivable" (1978: 91).

⁷ Luce Irigaray argues that "[t]he justification given for breaking up mother-daughter love is that this relationship is too conducive to fusion":

Psychoanalysis teaches us that it is essential to substitute the father for the mother to allow a distance to grow between daughter and mother. Nothing could be further from the truth. The mother-son relationship is what causes fusion, for the son does not know how to situate himself in regard to the person who bore him with no possible reciprocity. (1994: 110)

⁸ Much has made of Brontë's anti-Catholicism, yet her resistance to a controlling religion also extends to Calvinism, as Betsy Erkkila suggests in *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History and Discord*:

Like [Emily] Dickinson, Brontë refused to give up her 'fiery imagination' to the Calvinist law of the fathers. In letters to her friend and confidant, Ellen Nussey, she described her 'clouded and repulsive view' of religion. Like Dickinson, she experienced 'a dread lest, if I made the slightest profession, I should sink at once into Phariseism, merge wholly into the ranks of the self-righteous. . . . If the doctrine of Calvin be true I am already an outcast'. (1992: 65)

⁹ See Notes to Introduction (18, note 2) for Irigaray's comment on the prohibition of "masculine homosexuality" by this economy that "postulates homosexuality" (1981b: 107).

¹⁰ This example of two women looking at, and laughing at, a rather ridiculous man anticipates Brontë's far more extensive analysis of shared looking as an expression of subversive female homosocial bonding in *Villette*, which I discuss in depth in Chapter 3.

¹¹ This shared laughter is, obviously, quite different from the laughter of the lonely and imprisoned Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, who has only her keeper, Grace Poole, for company. The strength of two unmarried girls laughing at a foolishly vain curate rings rather hollow, however, when their silence and enclosure in marriage at the end of the novel is considered.

¹² This male obsession with marriage is reminiscent of Gayle Rubin's description of "[t]he Lele and the Kuma . . . two of the clearest ethnographic examples of the exchange of women [where] [m]en in both cultures are perpetually engaged in schemes which necessitate that they have full control over the sexual destinies of their female kinswomen" (1975: 82).

¹³ Mary Poovey writes that "legislation about married women's property was finally brought to the attention of both houses of Parliament in 1857":

At mid-century, married women's property was governed by two different sets of judge-made law, the common law and equity. Under the common law of coverture, most of a woman's property became her husband's absolutely when she married, whether she brought that property into the marriage or acquired it subsequently. While the rights of the husband varied according to the nature of the property in question, the effect of the common law was to place a married woman in an indirect relation to property and to all transactions concerning it. All of a married woman's income belonged to her husband; she could not bind herself to a contract; her testamentary capacity was extremely limited and could be exercised only by the consent of her husband. (1988: 70 – 71)

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the "Court of Chancery had established by precedent a provision that enabled a married woman to possess property (both land and chattels) separately from her husband" (71). However, as Poovey illustrates, "while equity could give the married woman the right to own property, her relation to that property continued to be both indirect and limited" (71) because control over the property (in the form of a trust) remained in the hands of a male agent appointed to the job by the male benefactor (usually the woman's father): "The principle of separate property, then, did not function to extend women's rights but to protect the property rights of a man, initially the father, but, according to the terms of the trust, whatever man was designated trustee" (72).

¹⁴ Another possible reading of Helstone's prohibition of a marriage between Caroline and Robert could be that it is an anti-incest and pro-exogamy stance, which does make him the only one in the novel to promote exogamy: Caroline is related to the Moores, and Shirley is related to Caroline via Mary Cave, which makes Shirley related to Louis Moore also. Both marriages could therefore be seen as endogamous and incestuous.

¹⁵ One is tempted to read these passages as Brontë's just revolt against the poet Southey's response to her letter which admonished her to stick to woman's work and

leave writing to the men: "Literature is not the business of a woman's life, and it cannot be" (quoted in Gérin 1969: 110).

¹⁶ Brontë includes an example of this type of enabling relationship between a servant and her mistress in all three novels discussed in this thesis. As I show in my discussion of *Jane Eyre*, Bessie not only serves as a "good" mother, but provides Jane with a literary framework within which to situate her own narrative/life. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe visits and "consult[s] an old servant of our family; once my nurse, now housekeeper at a grand mansion", after Miss Marchmont's death leaves her "once more alone" (1987b: 103). Although Mrs Barrett does not explicitly help her, it is after this visit that Lucy decides to go to London. Returning the following day to tell her old nurse of her plans, Mrs Barrett, again indirectly, gives Lucy valuable information when she tells her that "there are many English women in foreign families" (105) working as children's nurses or governesses. This "old friend" further helps Lucy by giving her "the address of a respectable old-fashioned inn in the city, which, she said, my uncles used to frequent in former days" (105).

Chapter 2

“Speak I must”: Women’s stories/*sorties* in *Jane Eyre*

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.

Hélène Cixous – “The Laugh of the Medusa”

Jane Eyre, motherless and economically powerless, undergoes certain traditional female temptations, and finds that each temptation presents itself along with an alternative – the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for support.

Adrienne Rich – “*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman”

★

Jane Eyre was presented to the nineteenth-century reading public as “An Autobiography” edited by Currer Bell. Fictional autobiography was, of course, nothing extraordinary, but what singled *Jane Eyre* out for a particularly virulent attack by anti-feminist critics of the time, many of them women, was the outspokenness of this particular governess. Jane Eyre not only exposes the class and gender constructions of Victorian society, but also proceeds to marry the master of the house after having inherited her own wealth. She refuses to submit to the predominant ideology that demands from her both silence and passivity in the face of injustice and exploitation. In fact, she persistently undermines the structures set in place to contain peripheral women like herself. In a rigidly applied class hierarchy, “proud” and “ungrateful” Jane Eyre, as Elizabeth Rigby called her in 1848, does not know her *place*:

It pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, and penniless – yet she thanks nobody, and least of all Him, for the food and raiment, the friends, companions, and instructors of her helpless youth . . . on the contrary, she looks upon all that has been done for her not only as her undoubted right, but as falling far short of it. (Quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 338)

According to Rigby, “the auto-biography of Jane Eyre is preeminently an anti-Christian composition” (quoted in Poovey 1989: 239) because, like the working-class uprisings of the time, it acts against a God-appointed class system:

There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment . . . There is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man . . . a pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilised society in fact has at the present day to contend with. We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*. (239)

In her analysis of Victorian middle-class anxiety about the governess and women's work in general, “The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*”, Mary Poovey¹ notes that Rigby is not as unsympathetic to the plight of the governess as it may seem from her criticism of *Jane Eyre*. Her concern with their situation is apparent in her reviews of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*, as well as in the 1847 Report of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution. For instance, in the *Vanity Fair* review she makes the radical correlation between the governess' plight as a middle-class woman, “a lady, in every meaning of the word, born and bred” (236), and the general dependence of middle-class women on men. Her criticism of this situation is explicit when she writes that “[w]e need the imprudencies, extravagancies, mistakes, or crimes of a certain number of fathers, to sow the seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses” (236). Yet instead of following the argument to its logical conclusion, she resists it by defending female dependence. Her withdrawal from the implications of her analysis contradicts any real solidarity among middle-class women because she experiences her own apparently superior position as threatened. As a “needy lady”, as Rigby defines her, the middle-

class governess is separated from the lady of the house by what she calls “a fictitious barrier” (236). Recognising the “cruel weight” (236) of this barrier, she nonetheless insists on its application: “We must ever keep them in a sort of isolation, for it is the only means for maintaining that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact” (238).

Jane's narrative undoubtedly generates anxiety because it follows through on the premises Rigby puts forward but immediately contradicts. Written from a position of authority similar to Rigby's own, namely that of legitimate wife and mother, or *lady*, Jane's story is about the successful bridging of that “distance” (238) between lady and “needy lady” (236) that Rigby insists on maintaining. In contrast to Rigby's self-conscious dissociation from the middle-class governess by speaking as a wife and mother for the “we” of “English families” (238), Jane's autobiographical voice merges with the several other female voices in the text that speak from *outside* the parameters of the family. She speaks both as a governess, a woman fallen from her middle-class position who becomes sexually vulnerable as a result, and also as the wife of the man who had attempted and failed to seduce her and as the mother of his (legitimate) male heir. Her voice is therefore not simply that of the outsider whose rebellion against containment within patriarchal structures can be ignored or reviled. She also speaks from within those structures and gains legitimacy from her participation in the continuation of an economy that privileges the male line of descent.

By speaking from within the domestic sphere that represents woman's space, Jane's narrative transgresses one of the most important Victorian boundaries, that which separates the public from the private. It also exposes the hidden transgressions of class boundaries within the private or domestic sphere that are, as Ann McClintock argues, essential to the Victorian sense of order:

The middle-class determination to identify happiness with rational order and the clear demarcation of boundaries manifested itself in precise rules not only for assembling the public sphere but also for assembling domestic space. Household arrangements gradually took shape around a geometry of extreme

separation and specialization that came to discipline every aspect of daily life. Domestic space was mapped as a hierarchy of specialized and distinct boundaries that needed constant and scrupulous policing. (1994: 168)

Jane's transgression of these boundaries thus elicits Rigby's criticism, and the criticism of others who share her concerns, because of what McClintock calls "the middle-class fetish for boundary purity" (171). It is precisely because she is a governess and thus situated as a threshold figure between the two separated spheres of Victorian society, that she is seen to represent the controversy associated with women's work. As one of the many unmarried women dependent on their own labour for survival, Jane is an example of a "redundant woman", as the liberal manufacturer W. R. Greg defined the

hundreds of thousands of women – not to speak more largely still – scattered through all ranks, but proportionally most numerous in the middle and upper classes, – who have to earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men. (Quoted in Poovey 1988: 1)

Greg's obvious anxiety about what he sees as masses of unmarried women suggests a position similar to that of a *Saturday Review* writer who described marriage as "women's profession" for which their "training – that of dependence" prepares them (quoted in Poovey 1988: 154). For this writer, women, "by not getting a husband, or losing him", have "failed in business" (154). It is within this context of what constitutes women's work that Poovey locates the governess as "the border between the normative (working) man and the normative (nonworking) woman" (14):

Not a mother, the governess nevertheless performed the mother's tasks; not a prostitute, she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualized women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her 'natural' morality. (14)

The governess is paid for work usually associated with the mother whose middle-class position as *lady* depends upon her status as unemployed. Within the domestic sphere, therefore, the governess problematises this definition by exposing the contradictions inherent in it. Rigby's description of the governess as a "tabooed woman" (quoted in Poovey 1989: 232) further illustrates how the anxieties about "boundary purity" (McClintock 1994: 171) are played out in the arena of female sexuality. Poovey suggests that, *fallen* from her middle-class status, the governess becomes in the Victorian mind associated with both the sexually *fallen* prostitute and the lunatic. The threat she poses becomes one of sexual knowledge and loss of self-control, "revealing the mid-Victorian fear that the governess could not protect middle-class values because she could not be trusted to regulate her own sexuality" (Poovey 1989: 236).

Since women writers were subject to similar prejudices, because they too transgressed those boundaries of public and private within which proper feminine behaviour was constructed, the woman writer had to choose her subject matter with great circumspection. In choosing to make her fictional autobiographer a governess, Brontë risks the contamination of sexual knowledge associated with the governess. Whereas Elizabeth Gaskell in *Ruth* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh* could represent rape and sexual exploitation of women by men because they were both married and therefore seen to be writing from within the structure that protects (read: contains) women, the woman writer who is not married must develop strategies to disguise her gender if she is to escape censure and stigma.

One such strategy used by all three Brontë sisters, and many other women writers, was of course to use a pseudonym that seemed masculine. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, however, Charlotte Brontë presents Currer Bell not as writer, but as editor of Jane Eyre's autobiography, locating Jane as the author of her own text. Jane's narrative can be seen to both imitate and challenge the convention of the Richardsonian novel of seduction in which women are allowed to speak of their seduction or rape only in the privacy of letters to a

female confidante, which are in turn made public only by an authoritative male editor.² In the preface to *Clarissa*, Richardson for instance writes as the “editor to whom it was referred to publish the whole in such a way as he should think would be most acceptable to the public” (1985: 35). He submits these letters “to the perusal of several judicious friends”, all of them “gentlemen” (35). By situating Currer Bell as the editor, Brontë effectively protects her own identity and attempts to protect the reputation of Jane Eyre by mimicking the convention that frames women’s narratives as mediated by the moral judgement of the male editor who decides what to reveal or conceal. However, unlike the private reader constructed by the letter writer in the epistolary novel, Jane speaks and directs her autobiography at a public audience, the frequently addressed “reader” whose judgement is regularly invoked. Whereas the letter writer is, as Margaret Doody describes Pamela, “always in the middle of her experience” (1985: 9), the autobiographer consciously constructs her narrative, arranging events in sequence and attaching meaning to those events in retrospect to create the plot of her life. Even in the case of the fictional autobiographer such as Jane Eyre then, control over inclusion and exclusion, over plot, remains with the autobiographer. In the process Jane usurps the “authority, legitimacy, and readability” of the male speaking subject, “the subject of traditional autobiography” (Smith 1993: 155). It is a strategy Sidonie Smith describes as “the nitrate of mimicry . . . an unauthorised speaker positions herself in the locale of the universal subject, thereby introducing a menacing suspicion of inexact correlation between representations” (155).³ In order to achieve this, however, Brontë provides Jane with the cloak of respectability afforded by her status as a married woman and a mother, whose sexual knowledge is gained within the legitimate framework of marriage.

Jane's skilful use of narrative *camouflage*⁴ is illustrated in her manipulation of Rochester's apparently successful usurpation of her narrative when he tells her the stories of the other women in his life. Her willingness to “listen as if it were nothing new, and certainly nothing distasteful” when Rochester “pours into her ears disgraceful tales of his past life, connected with the birth of little Adèle” (Rigby quoted in Poovey 1989: 240) obviously shocked

her Victorian audience. Yet it would clearly have damaged her credibility as female autobiographer far more had she presented this illicit knowledge in her own voice. Including these stories as he tells them to her serves the purpose of lending them the authority of a male voice. However, by placing them within the larger context of the autobiography of the woman who retells them as part of *her* own story, the authority of this voice – the voice of every male author constructing female identity according to narrow stereotypes – is effectively undermined. By being made part of Jane's text, Céline, Giacinta, Clara, Bertha, and even Grace Poole, Blanche Ingram and Adèle are provided with a critical context within which the reader can evaluate Rochester's litany of misogynist invectives that recall Mrs Reed, John Reed and Brocklehurst's labelling of Jane. Jane effectively uses the narratives by Rochester to expose them as *stories*, examples of the types of patriarchal texts within which women are enclosed or from which they are erased.

Gilbert and Gubar's view that by telling Jane about his mistresses, Rochester acts from "his sense of equality with her" (1984: 353), thus seems optimistic since they do not question his version of events or his view of the women involved: "For of course, despite critical suspicions that Rochester is seducing Jane in these scenes, he is, on the contrary, solacing himself with her unseducible independence in a world of self-marketing Célines and Blanchés" (353). Although Rochester is undoubtedly "solacing himself", he has no idea yet whether Jane is "seducible" (353) or not. At this point, he seems to be testing her and she is clever enough to realise that he is also attempting to influence her opinion of her pupil, Adèle. Even at this early stage, she is critical of his part in the transactions he describes and answers him with a pointed reference to his role in Adèle's life:

Adèle is not answerable for either her mother's faults *or yours*: I have a regard for her, and now that I know she is, in a sense, parentless – forsaken by her mother and *disowned by you, sir*, – I shall cling closer to her than before. How could I possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her governess as a nuisance, to a lonely little orphan, who leans towards her as a friend? (Brontë 1987a: 146; emphasis added)

Jane's identification with Adèle as an orphaned, "forsaken" and "disowned" (146) daughter of a *fallen* woman defies the value-system that exonerates the male client whose participation in the sexual transaction is always from a position of superior economic and social power. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, Jane seems to be well aware of the economy that makes it necessary for women to be "self-marketing" (Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 353). Her ability to later recognise herself as a possible "successor of these poor girls" (Brontë 1987a: 316) if she allows Rochester to convince her that she is different from them and will be treated differently by him, is what saves her from losing her identity in relation to him. She also identifies herself with Bertha when she tells Rochester: "you are inexorable for that unfortunate *lady*: you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – *she cannot help being mad*" (305, emphasis added). Jane recognises that if she herself were to become mad (or *driven* mad by his treatment as Bertha may have been) he would treat her with the same contempt (305). Jane furthermore describes Bertha as a "lady" (305), thus drawing attention to Bertha's position as Rochester's legitimate middle-class wife. Jane effectively crosses the distance between wives and mistresses, ladies and fallen women because she sees herself as subject to the same rules and prejudices as other women under patriarchy. However, Jane's representation of Bertha is, of course, tainted by Rochester's description and her role in Jane's narrative is, as the debate around it has shown, highly ambivalent.

Jane's reading and retelling of Rochester's stories can be compared to the way in which Hélène Cixous has read and retold Freud's case of Dora: "I immediately operated a reading that was probably not centred as Freud wanted it to be . . . I read it as a fiction" (quoted in Gallop 1982: 137). Rochester is clearly no Freud, but he talks *about* women with the same "smug certitude" (137) Jane Gallop sees in Freud's authoritative interpretations. Similarly, Jane's inclusion of Rochester's descriptions of his affairs within her own text opens them up to scrutiny. Our reading of Rochester's stories is, as a result, shaped by the context Jane's narrative provides. This context further alerts us to the silence at the core of Rochester's numerous narratives about women:

the absence of any reference to his mother, Mrs Rochester, a title that is the locus of immense anxiety in the text.

Dora's case is significant in relation to *Jane Eyre* because, like Dora, Jane can accurately read the hidden subtext of the negotiations between men that turn women into objects to be bought or sold or discarded at will. Dora "broke off her analysis with Freud because she felt he colluded in a sexual bargain exchanging her between her father and her father's mistress' husband" (Gardiner 1988: 117). Jane's life and the telling thereof, represent, in this context, a Cixousian *sortie*, translated by Gallop as "exits, outlets, escapes, holidays, outings, sallies, sorties" and also "outbursts, attacks and tirades" (1982: 136). Gallop specifically remarks on the "warlike and the hysterical senses (attack), but in general there is a sense of exits, openings, escapes from enclosures" (136). Jane's autobiographical narrative opens up the stories men tell of women, showing them to be anything but those marvellous tales of "chivalrous true love which consecrated womenkind" as Mrs Oliphant chose to see them (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 337). In this way Jane exposes what Angela Leighton calls the "schizophrenia of Victorian morality" (1992: 357) because she subverts Rochester's view of himself as one of "the figures of literary romance, dark seducers or passionate rakes" (355). She allows him, instead, to reveal himself as one of the "real unmentionables of Victorian prostitution: the male client . . . the men who in reality provide the rationale of prostitution . . . quite simply, other women's husbands, for whom the illicit is routine" (357).

However, Jane's narrative strategy does not protect her against what Leighton describes as the "whole complicated magic of sin and contamination [that] comes into play" when women speak, because "the connection between writing and sinning is a close and involved one . . . Writing and sexuality double each other" (353). The doubling of writing/speaking and sexuality, opening the lips to speak out and being sexually open and thus compromised, underlies Victorian attacks on *Jane Eyre*. As I suggested earlier, it is an anxiety that attaches itself particularly to the figure of the governess who, as

we see in Freud's analysis of Dora, was perceived to be "the source of all . . . secret (sexual) knowledge" (Freud 1986a: 36n).⁵

Regardless of her narrative disguises, Jane is seen by her Victorian readers as contaminated by her refusal to maintain the distance between herself and the fallen women she includes in her story and her life. Jane's refusal to be shut up or shut in by a system that both exploits and condemns female sexuality is at the heart of her autobiographical project: "*Speak I must*" (Brontë 1987a: 36), the ten-year-old Jane resolves when Mrs Reed's abusive treatment becomes unbearable, and thus the impetus to her autobiography is established. It is this female writing self who speaks and moves that contradicts the model of female passivity and silence perpetuated by patriarchal texts.

Rochester's Bluebeardian seductiveness represents the temptation *par excellence* for the woman whose movement out of containment coincides with a quest for kinship, intimacy and relationship. The intensity of this desire is passionately articulated when Jane tells Helen Burns:

[I]f others don't love me, I would rather die than live . . . to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest. (70)

As another woman's husband, Rochester couches his tales of adultery in the language of romance. Always the victim of women's sexual wiles, his home is however the prison for a mad wife and an illegitimate daughter, both of whom he owns yet disowns, denying them kinship. When Jane refuses to become his mistress, he threatens that he will return to a life of debauchery and lust: "You fling me back on lust for a passion – vice for an occupation?" (321). Burdening her with such responsibility, he offers the alternative of virtual imprisonment: "You shall go to a place I have in the south of France: a white-walled villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. There you shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life" (308). This is a scenario frighteningly close to the fantasy he tells Adèle: "I am going to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there

I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there, and only me" (269).

Yet Jane, though tempted, does not succumb. She exposes the similarity between Rochester and John Reed by recognising the underlying master-slave dynamic that informs the relationship between men and women under patriarchy. Rochester, for instance, quite unselfconsciously assumes the superior position of master when he tells Jane: "Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading" (316). Jane already knows at this point that she will fill the same role as did Céline, Giacinta and Clara if she were to succumb to his proposition. She had earlier experienced the dangers of this role when Rochester, following his moon fantasy, expressed the desire to dress her "like a doll": "He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched" (272). Instead of becoming a member of Rochester's "seraglio" (272), Jane represents herself in a corresponding fantasy as a liberator of "enslaved" women:

I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved – your Harem inmates amongst the rest. I'll get admitted there, and I'll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred. (272)

To read Jane's fantasy as simply informing the narrative project of her autobiography may seem to ignore the significance of colonialism in the novel. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's groundbreaking essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", many critics have identified the "active ideology of imperialism" (1997: 899) inherent in the text.⁶ Carl Plasa suggests that, "[l]ike many other nineteenth-century texts . . . Brontë's novel precisely formulates its critique of gender- and class-ideology by means of a habitual recourse to a language – principally a metaphors – of enslavement

and mastery" (1994: 67). He argues that, regardless of the "pivotal and determinant role of the West Indies" in the novel, it "nowhere explicitly refers to the institution of British slavery or the colonialist project" (67). Jane Eyre's "metaphorics of slavery" (67) then become, according to Plasa, a "double-inscription" (69) that "exploit[s] the slave-trope but at the same time it also comments upon and indeed *critiques* its own rhetorical procedures" (69). This dual impulse is apparent in Jane's fantasy that seems to have its origin in a sympathetic identification with "enslaved" (Brontë 1987a: 272) women but which in fact positions her as the liberating "missionary". It is a position Jenny Sharpe criticises because it "establishes the racial superiority of the European by constructing the native woman as an object to be saved" (1993: 30). In a similar analysis Suvendrini Perera notes that "the slender consciousness of a wider female oppression seems to be always finally repressed or denied by the objectification of the colonised or imagined 'oriental' female subject" (1991: 82).

The tensions and conflicts apparent in Jane's fantasy and autobiography illustrate precisely the way in which Victorian middle-class ideology was, as Poovey argues, "both contested and always under construction" (1988: 3). In an attempt to expose the construction of gender by patriarchal ideology, Jane relies on an analogy between the domestic oppression of women and slavery, an analogy that is inherently contaminated by the ideology of imperialism. Susan Meyer points out that Brontë here "responds to the seemingly inevitable analogy in nineteenth-century British texts that compares white women with blacks in order, within the framework of a belief in racial hierarchy, to degrade both groups and assert the need for white male control" (1991: 163). Although Brontë uses this figurative strategy "to signify not shared inferiority but shared oppression" the analogy "does not preclude racism" (163). In contrast to Spivak's "unquestioned ideology" (quoted in Meyer 163) of imperialism in *Jane Eyre*, Meyer proposes "an ideology of imperialism which is questioned – and then reaffirmed" (163). As a fictional text posing as an autobiography, *Jane Eyre* cannot escape reproducing the ideological structures from within which it is written. Even so, it also exposes the inconsistencies of those structures, thus performing what

Poovey describes as the “double duty of voicing and silencing ideological contradictions” (188: 124):

Because literary texts mobilise fantasies without legislating action, they provide the site at which shared anxieties and tensions can surface as well as be symbolically addressed. In fact, if one of the functions of literary work is . . . to work through material or ideological contradictions so as to produce such symbolic resolutions, then one component or stage of this working through will necessarily involve exposing to view the very contradictions the text manages or resolves. (124)

Jane begins her story at the point when she stops being the passive victim of John Reed. Her movement out begins with her speaking out after nine years of abuse:

He bullied and punished me: not two or three times in a week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired; because I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions: the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him, and Mrs Reed was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me; though he did both now and then in her presence: more frequently however behind her back. (Brontë 1987a: 10)

On this day, however, though “[h]abitually obedient to John” (10), Jane attempts to avoid being hurt by the book he throws at her and in a parodic reversal of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, is woken from her slumber, not by a kiss, but by a wound to her head: she “fell, striking [her] head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp; [her] terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded” (10). As if the cognisance of her own capacity to bleed awakens her from a life of endurance, she names him as a “[w]icked and cruel boy . . . a slave-driver . . . like the Roman emperors” (10).

Liberated to defend herself by having first spoken the words, she does not merely succumb to his physical attack on her, but fights back: "I really saw in him a tyrant: a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort" (11).

A ten-year-old orphan, Jane is already a member of that group of fallen and wounded women who precede her in fictional accounts of seduction. Yet she is also differentiated from them. In contrast to what Janet Todd describes as the "bizarre motif often connected with fictional virginity in the eighteenth-century novel . . . the nosebleed which the heroines often experience at violent, usually sexual crises" (1980: 404), Jane falls and cuts herself on the door. Associations with "defloration, hinting at rape, seduction, venereal disease, and all manner of psychological and sexual wounding of women" (404) are clearly also present here. Jane's wound is however not simply analogous with menstruation, as an involuntary nosebleed would be. In fact, the bleeding does not "keep the lusty male at bay" (404) as it does in *Clarissa*, *Julie*, and *Fanny Hill* where the nosebleed is associated with menstruation. Jane's bleeding is the result of her active attempt to avoid John's attack. When she is again forced to defend herself against John, she reverses the conventional seduction scenario by hitting *his* nose with "as hard a blow as [her] knuckles could inflict" (Brontë 1987a: 27).

Jane's bleeding could, in the context of Todd's description of the symbolism of the nosebleed in eighteenth-century literature, be seen as "evoking female pity" (1980: 405) because it "implied the female predicament – defloration, menstruation, and childbirth – and pleads with other women for a common front, a unity before the menacing male" (405). Even though Jane's female reader may sympathise with her, the women at Gateshead Hall clearly feel no pity or compassion for Jane and instead turn on her as the aggressor, the one to be locked away, shut up and kept still: "Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs Reed . . . she now came upon the scene followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot" (Brontë 1987a: 11). Jane's resistance is met by threats of

bondage and the “strange penalties” (12) she had indeed anticipated, turn out to be Bessie's threat that she will be “tied down” (11) with Abbot's garters, a particularly significant symbol for the containment of women by other women. Elaine Showalter suggests that this scene is remarkably like “the flagellation ceremonies of Victorian pornography . . . the *mise-en-scène* is a remote chamber with a voluptuous decor, and the struggling victim is carried by female servants” (1977: 116). Furthermore, the scene is made more “titillating because the bonds are to be maid's garters” (116).

It is precisely the symbolic implications of being “tied down” (Brontë 1987a: 11) by women's underwear immediately after being wounded by an adolescent boy, and defending herself against him, that seems to imply a world Showalter describes as one “without female solidarity – where women police other women on behalf of patriarchal tyranny” (1977: 117). Abbot's verbal attack on Jane for her “shocking conduct” (Brontë 1987a: 12) is however balanced by Bessie's ambivalence, an ambivalence that marks her relationship with Jane throughout her stay at Gateshead Hall. Bessie, though the one to threaten Jane with bondage, is also the one to note that Jane “never did so before” (12) and her chastisement takes the form of a practical assessment of Jane's dependence on Mrs Reed. Whereas Abbot becomes Mrs Reed's mouthpiece, expressing the opinion that Jane is “an underhand little thing” (12), Bessie notes the control Mrs Reed has over Jane's life: “if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor-house” (13).

A pointed discourse on class difference which also defines Jane's position in the Reed home informs this interplay between Jane on the one hand, and the two maids as agents of Mrs Reed on the other. When Abbot calls Jane “less than a servant, for [she] do[es] nothing for [her] keep” (12) and tells her that she “ought not to think [her]self on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows [her] to be brought up with them” (13), her criterion is that “[i]hey will have a great deal of money, and [Jane] will have none”. It is a value-system Mrs Reed embodies and which her son acts on. Abbot merely echoes John's verbal prelude to his attack on Jane:

You have no business to take our books: you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. (11)

If Gateshead Hall represents the space in Jane's narrative where "female solidarity" (Showalter 1977: 117) is almost entirely absent, it is Mrs Reed who enforces this. In a sense, Mrs Rigby and Mrs Oliphant's outrage at Jane's rebelliousness merely reiterates the position Mrs Reed takes in the text. For it is in the confrontation between Mrs Reed and the ten-year-old Jane that the battle between the old, traditional role of woman as protector and keeper of a system that consistently deprives women of any real power and the newly born consciousness of the daughters who reject the tyranny of patriarchy, is played out. In contrast to the healing and empowering mother-daughter relationship between Caroline Helstone and Mrs Pryor in *Shirley*, Mrs Reed's relationship with her daughters and with Jane reminds one of the rivalry and hostility of Mrs Yorke. Mrs Yorke's mothering extends only to her "youngest" child (Brontë 1983: 470), whether male or female:

[I]t is all her own yet – and that one she has not yet begun to doubt, suspect, condemn; it derives its sustenance from her; it hangs on her; it clings to her; it loves her above everything else in the world: she is sure of that, because, as it lives by her, it cannot otherwise, therefore she loves it. (470)

Mrs Reed, however, loves John not because he is her youngest child, but because he is her only son. The power Mrs Reed gains by the death of her husband will last only until her son reaches maturity "within a few years" (Brontë 1987a: 11), as he tells Jane, when he will inherit everything. The limitations of her power by proxy must therefore be seen to inform her relationship with her son. Since it is in her best interest to be in his favour when he eventually inherits the estate, the relationship lacks real affection and

love, becoming instead one of expediency. The only way in which she can conceive of ensuring his loyalty to her is to indulge him.

Mrs Reed's irrational indulgence of John is shown to be the cause of his eventual suicide, her own death, and the financial ruin of her daughters. The mother-son relationship, idolised and idealised in Western culture, emerges as not only destructive, but fundamentally one-sided: "John had not much affection for his mother and sisters" (10); "he called his mother 'old girl' too, sometimes; reviled her for her dark skin, similar to his own; bluntly disregarded her wishes; not infrequently tore and spoiled her silk attire; and he was still 'her own darling'" (15).⁷

The Gateshead section of *Jane Eyre* therefore also represents a *sortie*. It both opens up to scrutiny and attacks the economic and political structures of patriarchy upon which the great Victorian houses were built. It furthermore exposes and condemns the role played by women like Mrs Reed as the gatekeepers or guardians of patriarchy. Within this system which perpetuates itself via the automatic transference of economic power from father to eldest son, the mother's complicity results in an almost complete alienation from her daughters, who are raised according to marriage-market principles. Georgiana and Eliza represent in extreme forms the options available to the dutiful daughters raised by dutiful mothers: "an advantageous match with a wealthy wornout man of fashion" or "the convent" (244). These sisters have no affection for their mother or for each other. The dying Mrs Reed lies "almost unheeded" (239) while her daughters are locked in hostile rivalry, best illustrated by Georgiana's accusations against Eliza:

Everybody knows you are the most selfish, heartless creature in existence; and I know your spiteful hatred towards me: I have had a specimen of it before in the trick you played me about Lord Edwin Vere: you could not bear me to be raised above you, to have a title, to be received into circles where you dare not show your face, and so you acted the spy and informer, and ruined my prospects for ever. (239)

The narrative thus explodes the façade of that typically Victorian tableau of mother and children with which Jane's story as outsider and orphan begins: "Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fire-side, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy" (7). It is of course what happens in parenthesis that is real and not posed. Yet the tableau serves to illustrate Jane's exclusion from what symbolises "coming home"(7) – a warm fire and a warm, loving mother. Jane is "dispensed from joining the group" and kept "at a distance" (7) ostensibly because she does not conform to the façade of the ideal Victorian child which Mrs Reed deems appropriate. She must "acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner, – something lighter, franker, more natural" (7) to be allowed entry into this charmed circle. The irony is obvious here. To "acquire" an appearance suiting Mrs Reed's description is not "natural" but calculated, as the behaviour of her own children illustrates.

As outsider and observer of the idealised family group, Jane's position here recalls that of Catherine and Heathcliff on the night of their visit to Thrushcross Grange in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The two 'bad' children, drawn by the "Grange lights" and their curiosity to "see [how] the Lintons passed their Sunday evening" look in on a scene of apparent "heaven", as Heathcliff tells Nelly Dean on his return to the Heights (1978: 88):

[A]h! it was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. (89)

The "good children" (88) within this heavenly room, Edgar and Isabella Linton, are however "screaming" and "shrieking" and "weeping", having "nearly pulled in two between them" a small puppy (89). Catherine and Heathcliff, here joined in their mutual derision of "the petted things" (89), are separated when the Lintons' dog, Skulker, bites Catherine's foot. She is taken into the heavenly room and is soon warmly ensconced, "dividing her food between the

little dog and Skulker" (92) whilst Heathcliff is chased outside. Catherine's wound, like Jane's head-wound, becomes the signifier of change, perhaps even the ritualistic wounding of the pubescent girl by agents of patriarchy. It is the genesis of what Gilbert and Gubar describes as a "sinister ritual of initiation, the sort of ritual that has traditionally weakened mythic heroines from Persephone to Snow White" (1984: 273). Having eaten of their "negus" and "cakes" (Brontë 1978: 92) she is absorbed into the civilised and civilising world of the Grange, marries Edgar Linton, and, alienated from and longing for Heathcliff, she declines into illness and eventual death.

However, Jane Eyre's wounding does not result in the same process of absorption into the patriarchal fold. In fact, her position within the Reed family resembles that of the outcast Heathcliff, brought home by the master of the house to be raised with his own children, far more than it does that of Catherine, legitimate daughter with privileges and temptations to suit. Both Jane and Heathcliff are abused by the children of the men whose favourites they become, and both lose the protection of these men after a short time, leaving them at the mercy of those whose jealousy had been roused by this favouritism. Their expulsion from the family circle results in two entirely different strategies of self-validation and perhaps even revenge. Heathcliff, the "gypsy brat" (77), disrupts the very foundations of patrilineal descent based on the legitimacy of the first-born son by using its own methods of manipulation and control of women to secure his ownership of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. At novel's end, the status quo is of course reinstated. Heathcliff is dead and Hareton Earnshaw is master of the estate that had been his father's and his grandfather's.

Jane's journey from orphan at Gateshead to heir of the Eyres and mother of the male heir of the Rochesters at Ferndean apparently wreaks less havoc with patriarchal structures of inheritance. Yet it provides a far more radical interrogation of precisely the methods Heathcliff adopts as his unquestioned male prerogative. Jane's narrative thus becomes an exploration of the position of women under patriarchy who are, as Hélène Cixous describes it, "omitted, brushed aside at the scene of inheritances" (1981: 240). This is

Jane's own particular status. Born of a woman who wilfully disregarded another cornerstone of patriarchy, the exchange of women between men, she inherits from her mother both kinship with the Reeds and the stigma of the woman *fallen* from the heights of her class stratum because she marries "a poor clergyman . . . against the wishes of her friends who considered the match beneath her" (Brontë 1987a: 26).

Circumventing the control of her father over her choice of husband, Jane's mother also escapes being traded and is punished for her "disobedience" (26) by her father, who "cut her off without a shilling" (26). Her refusal to be an object of exchange between her father and the husband of his choice challenges both her status as his possession and his authority to use her as such. The father does not give his daughter and he does not receive anything in exchange for her. As a result of the daughter's transgression, the money she would have received had she married according to her father's dictates and which would automatically have become her husband's, is withheld. Her death a year later, the indirect result not so much of her transgression as of the punishment meted out to her by her father, leaves her infant daughter Jane an orphan, and she, in turn, is reabsorbed into the Reed clan and has to fight her own way out.

This process of liberation begins when she overcomes her fear of John Reed and fights back. Her subsequent confinement in the red-room becomes symbolic of the confinement of all little girls in the patriarchal chamber. Particularly the bad little girls who must be locked in, kept still and quiet, with threats that God the almighty patriarch will send "something bad . . . down the chimney [to] fetch you away" (13). It is also the room within which little girls learn to look into the mirror instead of looking out of the windows. Jane's "fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depths" (14) of the "great looking-glass" between two "muffled windows" and sees "the strange little creature there gazing at [her], with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still" (14). This "spirit . . . like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp" (14) anticipates Jane's first meeting with Rochester, of course, but here it is also like Cixous's "uncanny

stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions” (quoted by Smith 1993: 89).

After the violent physical conflict with a boy who is four years older than she is, the ten-year-old Jane disengages herself from this contact by creating the spirit-child in the mirror. This is similar to Virginia Woolf's vision of a “horrible face – the face of an animal” (quoted in Smith 1993: 89) in the mirror, after her half-brother sexually abused her. It provides an interesting point of comparison, particularly when framed by Sidonie Smith's analysis of the change in self-perception this abuse causes:

With the revelation of sexual abuse, Woolf introduces a liminal scene in which the young girl experiences the loss of her own body to the sexual domination and exploitation of the patriarch, an older brother and putative protector. Her body is literally taken away from her . . . the child experiences the painful recognition that her body is not hers to control, that it is there for others to handle. If that handling is physically invasive, it is also culturally pervasive. For Woolf interjects here her memory of childhood injunction against bodies being touched. (89)

This is not to suggest that John sexually abuses Jane but to allow for the overtones of sexual dominance and exploitation present in a situation where the power imbalance between male and female is so extreme as Jane's comparison of John to a “slave-driver” and “tyrant” (Brontë 1987a: 11) implies. Her experience of his continued attacks on her is intensely physical: “every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near” (10). She is deeply repulsed by his physical presence, his “disgusting and ugly appearance” (10). Yet, in the patriarchal economy Mrs Reed guards, Jane's self-defence and not John's attack is punished. Locking Jane in the room of the dead patriarch (the red-room which is thus also the Reed-room) who is incapable of helping her – who has in fact been diminished to “a miniature” (14) in a secret drawer in his room – Mrs Reed's loyalty to the son who has replaced the father is underscored. Here Jane must learn her

place within the Reed hierarchy. Here she must become “that specular self which encloses her in the prisonhouse of gender, in identity's body” (Smith 1993: 89).⁸

Unlike the animal in Woolf's vision which associates woman's body with the bestial, Jane's mirror-vision is of being disembodied, a ghost, a (no)thing. This vision mirrors her place within the Reed family as less than a servant, less than nothing, as having no value. Jane awakes from her unconscious, slumbering state when she hits her head and becomes sensible of “somewhat pungent suffering” (Brontë 1987a: 11). She achieves a sense of her own subjectivity in her relation to John and her *fall* becomes a fall into action (one could even argue that the door signifies an exit or escape from the confinement of her situation) and a refusal to be merely a passive object for his cruelties. Unlike Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*, then, Jane's wound awakens her body to suffering and engenders a consciousness of herself as entirely her own possession.⁹ In a reversal of Mrs Reed's intention, the red-room becomes the womb from which Jane is born to her self, the essence of which Rochester in his gypsy disguise describes:

I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me to do so. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure, born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give. (203)

Thus, as Adrienne Rich suggests, “she feels so unalterably herself” (1979: 91) that her tale is not so much a *Bildungsroman* as the tale of a woman resisting the “temptations” to be untrue to herself by assuming the roles tailored by patriarchy. Instead of the “perfect submission and stillness” (Brontë 1987a: 18) Mrs Reed demands, Jane moves and speaks. When Bessie tells Mr Lloyd, the apothecary attending Jane, a watered-down version of what had caused Jane's wound, this new-born capacity to speak out in her own defence generates Jane's movement away from Gateshead Hall, the place where she had been, to use Rich's term, so “wildly unmothered” (1977: 226)

As surrogate mother, Mrs Reed shows herself incapable of mothering even her own daughters. The prototypical mother-of-the-son, she is, as Luce Irigaray describes the role of the patriarchal mother, the “reproducer of the social order, acting as the infrastructure of that order” (quoted in Whitford 1991: 77). Her excessive hostility towards Jane is explained in these terms eight years later when Jane returns to Gateshead at the request of the dying woman. In a subtle parody of the return of the prodigal son, Jane finds the Reed estate in financial ruin, the son's profligacy having ended in suicide, causing his mother's stroke, and the two daughters locked in open dislike and anger. This illustrates Mrs Reed's destructive participation in her son's self-indulgence as an inescapable aspect of her patriarchal role. There is no remorse when she at last tells Jane that she “had twice done [her] a wrong” (Brontë 1987a: 240). Jane finds Mrs Reed as “relentless as ever” (232): “she was resolved to consider me bad to the last; because to believe me good, would give her no generous pleasure: only a sense of mortification” (233). In turn, Jane who had arrived with a “strong yearning to forget and forgive injuries” (232) is instantly challenged and “felt a determination – to be her mistress in spite both of her nature and her will” (233).

Thus the dynamic between the two women that began when Jane was a child is perpetuated by Mrs Reed's refusal to see Jane as anything other than a rival, a participant in a triangular relationship. Her hatred of Jane, even to the extent of wishing her dead, is inextricably linked to jealousy of her husband's love for his sister, Jane's mother:

I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband's only sister, and a great favourite with him: he opposed the family disowning her when she made her low marriage; and when news came of her death, he wept like a simpleton. He would send for the baby, though I entreated him rather to put it out to nurse and pay for its maintenance. I hated it the first time I set my eyes on it – a sickly, whining, pining thing! It would wail in its cradle all night long – not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and moaning. Reed pitied it; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age. (234)

Mr Reed's relationship with his sister and her child makes him, in his wife's view, unfit as a male in the patriarchal economy she represents. It shows him as "weak, naturally weak" (234), far inferior to her own male kin whom her son resembles: "John does not at all resemble his father . . . John is like me and my brothers – he is quite a Gibson" (234). If powerless in her relationship with her son, she has the power to disobey her husband's last wish to "rear and maintain [Jane] as one of her own children" (16). Instead, she makes Jane the scapegoat for all her pent-up rage and frustration. This is then the only power a woman in her position has – the power over her daughters and other women towards whom she automatically assumes a position of competitive hostility. Mrs Reed shows herself to be the true daughter of Mr Reed the elder who rejected his own daughter because of her marriage to Jane's father, because she punishes the child of that rebellious union with a denial of kinship ties. She refuses to submit to Mr Reed's wish that Jane should be treated as part of the Reed family and, when Jane's father's brother, John Eyre, attempts to contact Jane because he wants her to be his heir, Mrs Reed prevents this reunion because, as she tells Jane: "I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle and placed in a state of ease and comfort was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead (241).

She justifies her lie by referring back to Jane's childhood outburst which, Mrs Reed says, she "could not forget" as she "could not forget [her] own sensations when [Jane] thus started up and poured out the venom of [her] mind" (241). What she does not mention is that Jane's outburst then was a rejection of any kind of kinship with herself as well as a denial of love for her. The denial of love where it has been most sought for and most consistently withheld does not diminish the impact of Jane's reversal of a punishment both her mother and herself were subjected to – being disowned by the Reed family.

After Jane's confinement in the red-room, Mrs Reed's next strategy of containment is to send Jane to Lowood where she knows Mr Brocklehurst's methods will teach Jane her proper place. But Jane, newly awakened to the

injustice of her position in the Reed home, will neither be silenced nor confined in the persona Mrs Reed creates for her:

Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence: – “I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved *you*; but I declare, I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; . . . I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty. (36, emphasis in original)

It is crucial for Jane to contradict Mrs Reed's construction of her as a liar because she realises that Mrs Reed is attempting to prevent her future happiness at Lowood by stigmatising her as a liar in an attempt to alienate her from others. Listening to the way in which Mrs Reed describes her to Brocklehurst, Jane saw “that she was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path” (34). Mrs Reed is clearly also attempting to discredit anything Jane may say about her treatment of the orphaned child. Jane's threat that she will “let everybody at Lowood know what you are, and what you've done” (37) is precisely the kind of exposure Mrs Reed fears. Speech therefore becomes Jane's most powerful weapon and it is undoubtedly why her autobiography caused the staunch supporters of patriarchy, such as Mrs Rigby and Mrs Oliphant, such distress.

Having thus spoken out against the powerful and punitive mother-figure, Jane is filled with “the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph . . . It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhopd-for liberty” (37). For Jane perceives this confrontation as “the hardest battle I had ever fought, and the first victory I had ever gained” (37), completely ignoring her earlier victories over John Reed. It follows therefore, that for the child Jane, as for the narrator of the story, the controlling, repressive mother, the patriarchal mother, poses the greatest threat to self-expression and self-

actualisation. This confrontation, even when it leaves the daughter “winner of the field” (37) is however a traumatic reversal of the child's conception of the natural order of the world: “A child cannot quarrel with its elders . . . without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction” (38).

Even so, Jane's successful liberation from Mrs Reed's freezing influence becomes apparent in her changed behaviour towards Bessie. Adrienne Rich describes Bessie as “the first woman to show Jane affection” (1979: 93), but Bessie's position as a servant in the Reed home makes her relationship with Jane an ambivalent one. Though often sympathetic, she also has to protect her job. Her frequent “scolding” (Brontë 1987a: 39) and “chidings” (7) are balanced by feeding Jane, an always powerful symbol of emotional nurturance in all Brontë's novels. Having overcome her fear of Mrs Reed, however, Jane makes light of Bessie's anger and for the first time behaves with easy affection towards the nursemaid, embracing her: “The action was more frank and fearless than any I was habituated to indulge in: somehow it pleased her” (39). Thus Bessie can in turn express her indirect criticism of Mrs Reed by telling Jane: “My mother said, when she came to see me last week, that she would not like a little one of her own to be in your place” (39). She is also able to tell the now “venturesome and hardy” Jane that she is “fonder of [her] than of all the others” (40), reciprocating Jane's earlier confession that in spite of Bessie's “capricious and hasty temper, and indifferent ideas of principle or justice” (29), she still “preferred her to any one else at Gateshead Hall”.

On the threshold of her departure Jane thus receives both validation for her rebellion against “all the others” (40) and encouragement for her future. It is Bessie who wakes Jane in the morning and who feeds and dresses her in preparation for her journey to Lowood. In leading Jane to the gate of Gateshead and placing her on the coach that will take her away from there, Bessie's symbolic significance as the teacher who initiates Jane into a life of “love and adventure” (9) emerges. For regardless of the inconsistency of other aspects of Bessie's mothering, she nurtures Jane's love of stories and books. A story-teller, Bessie's tales and songs interpret Jane's position as a *character*, the wandering “poor orphan child” (22), allowing her to see herself as part of a

larger context, a bigger world than Gateshead. Although she lacks the instruction of a wise mother, Jane learns from and is inspired by “the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings” (9) to the children. Their “eager attention” is “fed” with “passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period [Jane] discovered) from the pages of *Pamela*, and Henry, Earl of Moreland” (9). The education she receives here will stand her in good stead when she too is faced with her own Mr R. In fact, Jane’s first meeting with Rochester at night in a lane to Thornfield is framed by “Bessie’s tales” of the “Gytrash” (113).

With her “remarkable knack of narrative” (29), and her knowledge of “old” wisdom including dream interpretation (222), Bessie Lee is not just an ordinary nursery maid. Jane refers to what she has learnt from Bessie throughout her narrative and she assumes almost ritualistic significance in Jane’s life, appearing at moments of transition and change. Her presence at Jane’s departure from Gateshead Hall is repeated when Jane leaves Lowood. Bessie, now married to “Robert Leaven, the coachman”, arrives with her small son, and tells Jane she has a daughter “christened Jane” (91). She also tells Jane that her father’s brother, John Eyre, had been to Gateshead Hall, looking for her. Later in the narrative, when Bessie’s husband fetches Jane from Thornfield to return to Gateshead where Mrs Reed is dying, the importance of this information becomes clear. Mrs Reed confesses to Jane that she had received the letter from John Eyre and that she wrote to him saying that Jane was dead. The knowledge of her uncle’s existence and intentions is crucial to Jane because it motivates her to write to him at a time when she feels particularly threatened by Rochester’s possessive behaviour. She is as a result saved from a bigamous marriage to him.

“Lowood Institution”, Helen Burns tells Jane, “is partly a charity-school . . . an institution for educating orphans” (50). It is, however, Brocklehurst, the “black pillar” (31) upholding the dubious double standards of patriarchy within this “institution” who best describes the rationale behind his methods of control and containment: “my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh,

to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel" (65).

Both the absurdity and the hypocrisy of this position are immediately apparent, if not to Brocklehurst, then at least to Miss Temple and to Jane. His battle against the flesh extends only to the girls at the school, not to the women of his own family who arrive immediately after this "lecture on dress" (65). They are "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs", they have a "profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled" and Mrs Brocklehurst even wears "a false front of French curls" (65). This improvement on nature is perfectly acceptable, but the natural "abundance" (64) of a pupil's red, curly hair horrifies Brocklehurst. He demands that it "be cut off entirely" and when Miss Temple tells him that the hair "curls naturally", he answers "we are not to conform to nature" (64).

According to an ideology that views women's bodies as disturbingly close to nature, the Brocklehurst women represent the containment and harnessing of female sexuality that middle-class marriage requires. They are firmly within the realm of the tradable. Dressed and *coiffured*, their object status indicates the wealth of their husband and father, Mr Brocklehurst. Whereas the Brocklehurst women, like the Reed women, represent the domestic ideal of womanhood, the girls at Lowood are threatening to such a system because they represent the potential disruption of that system of containment. The "abundance" of red hair, a bright flame of potential disruptive sexuality in this cold, dark place that starves young girls into death and self-denial, shocks Brocklehurst precisely because it stirs him: "Suddenly his eye gave a blink, as if it had met something that either dazzled or shocked its pupil" (64). His immediate response is to assert his control over what he clearly sees as an expression of "the lusts of the flesh" (64). Like Lucy Snowe's dream of the nun's hair growing even after death in a disruptive sexual rebellion not even the grave can contain (Brontë 1987b: 451)¹⁰, hair here symbolises the sexual threat these girls embody in a society based upon the trade in women.

Brocklehurst epitomises the split in the Victorian male's sexual psyche which makes the Englishman, as Flora Tristan the French Romantic socialist

wrote in 1839, “a sober prude by day and a drunken lecher by night” (quoted in Leighton 1992: 343). Though one can hardly describe Brocklehurst as a “drunken lecher”, he is a man obsessively aware of the physical presence of these girls. If his inspection of their clothes, including their underwear, on the washing line seems to the twentieth-century reader a tame form of voyeurism, then its implications are far greater in the nineteenth-century context of sin and sexual temptation. Brocklehurst could perhaps be seen as a far less morally conscious example of the type represented by Gladstone, “a keen rescuer of fallen women, inclined to take them home to talk to his wife. [who] confessed in his diary that his motives were suspect: he feared in himself some ‘dangerous curiosity and filthiness of spirit’” (Leighton 1992: 355).

Lowood does indeed serve a similar role in this society as did the homes set up by philanthropists for fallen women, or prostitutes. As a charity organisation its purpose is mainly to regulate through education a mass of girls who will eventually, in one form or another, enter into the economy. More specifically, as a school for an impoverished middle-class market, the girls are trained to become governesses, the “anathematized race” as Mary Poovey defines them, “whose place in the complex system of associations in which the domestic ideal is also embedded” depends on their “sexual neutrality” (1989: 234).

The pupils of Lowood, although not fallen in the sexual sense, are, like Jane Eyre, fallen in terms of their class position. They represent, at least potentially, the sexual connotations of such a ‘fallen’ state. As orphans they are outside the structures of exchange between men because they will either remain single or have to negotiate their own marriages. They are thus perceived as potentially fallen women, not only by Brocklehurst, but also by middle-class society at large. The anxiety they elicit is intensified by their ability to work and earn money, liberating them from the need to marry even if only for economic survival. Hence the need to curb their spirit and body as early as possible, teaching them to know their proper, *low* place and preparing them for jobs such as governessing.

It could be argued that the disembodied wraith Jane sees in the patriarchal mirror at Gateshead Hall is the ultimate goal of the Lowood system. Removed from the physical and emotional abuse she suffered at Gateshead, Jane now finds herself in a community of girls suffering the same treatment on a far larger scale. Here, too, women are the agents of patriarchy in their enforcement of cruelties and deprivations. Miss Scatcherd is a particularly virulent example of suppressed rage finding as its scapegoat someone smaller and more vulnerable, like Helen Burns, who is unable – or unwilling – to defend herself. However, being one of a community of girls who are subject to the same treatment, instead of being the one singled out for it, provides Jane with a context for her outrage. At Lowood Jane has, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, “a chance to learn to govern her anger while learning to become a governess in the company of a few women she admires” (1984: 344).

Miss Temple and Helen Burns do indeed provide Jane with the nurturing love latent in Bessie's relationship with Jane. Instead of her exclusion from affection at Gateshead, Jane is drawn into the already existing relationship between Miss Temple and Helen, a relationship anticipating the intellectual fecundity of the Rivers sisters near the end of the novel. In a tableau negating the one from which Jane had been excluded at Gateshead, Miss Temple, Helen and Jane are grouped around the fire, having “feasted” (Brontë 1987a: 74) on toast and seed-cake. Miss Temple's room is not only a place of plenitude and “serenity” (74), but a space allowing mental expansion and access to knowledge:

They conversed of things I had never heard of; of nations and times past; of countries far away; or secrets of nature discovered or guessed at: they spoke of books: how many they had read! Then they seemed to be familiar with French names and French authors: but my amazement reached its climax when Miss Temple asked Helen if she sometimes snatched a moment to recall the Latin her father had taught her, and taking a book from a shelf, bade her read and construe a page of Virgil, and Helen obeyed, my organ of Veneration expanding at every sounding line. (74)

By becoming a member of this family, Jane can successfully fight the malevolent influence of Mrs Reed at Lowood when Brocklehurst attempts to alienate her from the other pupils by repeating Mrs Reed's accusations of deceitfulness: "You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse" (67). However, instead of being cast out, Miss Temple gives Jane the opportunity to tell "all the story of [her] sad childhood" (71). Thus, after verifying it by writing to Mr Lloyd, the apothecary who had attended Jane at Gateshead, Miss Temple

assembled all the whole school, announced that inquiry had been made into the charges alleged against Jane Eyre, and that she was most happy to be able to pronounce her completely cleared from every imputation. The teachers then shook hands with me and kissed me, and a murmur of pleasure ran through the ranks of my companions. (75)

Unlike the public vindication Jane craves and which results from Miss Temple's effort on her behalf, Helen Burns believes in a philosophy of silent forbearance. Her advice to Jane is to "forget" Mrs Reed's "severity" and to concentrate on the rewards of "Eternity" (59). It is this denial of "corruptible bodies" and "passionate emotions" (59) that constitutes the essential difference between Jane and Helen. Helen, for instance, reprimands Jane because she "think[s] too much of the love of human beings; [she is] too impulsive, too vehement" (70). Even though Jane's association with Helen and Miss Temple stimulates her "organ of Veneration" (74), the potential for a more negative influence is also present. Both teacher and pupil, each in her own way, illustrate the pitfalls for clever women who remain within the boundaries of what is considered proper female behaviour. Jane's inclusion in the relationship between Miss Temple and Helen is predicated on Jane's exclusion from the primary relationship between Helen and her teacher. Although she is a member of the group at the hearth, and not actively excluded from it as she had been at Gateshead, she remains the observer of this relationship and feels it "a privilege to be admitted to hear" (73) their conversation, in which she is

unable to participate. Only when the typhus epidemic frees Jane into nature with her new “chosen comrade” (78), Mary Ann Wilson, do the limitations and strictures of the Helen-Miss Temple relationship emerge in sharp contrast to the freedom Jane experiences for the first time.

In the absence of Mr Brocklehurst, whose fear of contagion keeps him away, an almost idyllic atmosphere settles on Lowood for the healthy children, who are allowed to “ramble in the woods, like gypsies, from morning till night” (78). This return to nature brings Jane her first real friendship of comfortable equality and mutual enjoyment. Although Mary Ann is older than Jane is, she is as uncritical and undemanding of Jane as Helen is exacting. Eating their “large piece of cold pie or thick slice of bread and cheese” on a “smooth and broad stone, rising white and dry from the very middle of the beck” (78), the two barefoot girls enjoy their freedom from Brocklehurst’s control. Far less restricted by the propriety and self-denial promoted by Helen and Miss Temple, Mary Ann is however not simply physical. Her vitality and intelligence are a source of pleasure to Jane, who describes her as

a shrewd observant personage, whose society I took pleasure in, partly because she was witty and original, and partly because she had a manner which set me at ease. Some years older than I, she knew more of the world, and could tell me many things I liked to hear: with her my curiosity found gratification: to my faults also she gave ample indulgence; never imposing curb or rein on anything I said. She had a turn for narrative, I for analysis; she liked to inform, I to question; so we got on swimmingly together, deriving much entertainment, if not much improvement, from our mutual intercourse. (78)

Like Bessie, Mary Ann is a storyteller, one who both entertains and teaches Jane about “the world” (78). Jane is also indulged and accepted for exactly who she is – nothing is expected from her. In retrospect, however, Jane describes Mary Ann as “inferior” (79) to Helen because “she could only tell [her] amusing stories, and reciprocate any racy and pungent gossip [Jane] chose to indulge in” (78) whereas Helen’s “pure society” provided “a taste of far higher things”. It appears as if Jane negates this friendship because she feels

guilty about underestimating Helen's consumption as "something mild" and enjoying the "sweet days of liberty" (79) while she was dying. On the night Helen dies Jane leaves both the forest and the friendship with Mary Ann behind her to become, in Helen's stead, Miss Temple's apprentice.

For eight years Miss Temple is like a "mother, governess, and . . . companion" to Jane and her friendship and society Jane's "continual solace" (84). Then, she too, like Helen, is "lost" to Jane because "destiny, in the shape of the Rev. Mr Nasmyth, came between [her] and Miss Temple" (85). One an angel in heaven, the other a potential angel in the house of her clergyman husband, Jane's two sister-mothers remain within the boundaries of convention. Soon after Miss Temple's departure from the school, Jane feels herself to be "in [her] natural element" (85), suggesting that the years spent in apprenticeship were indeed unnatural to her. She "begin[s] to feel the stirring of old emotions" (85). The "real world" (85) beckons:

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out . . . My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. (85)

Jane's relationships with women at Lowood illustrate the complexities of such relationships when circumscribed by structures that define woman's role as either submissive within the home as wife or in service to a greater cause like religion. Are these female homosocial relationships possible if marriage represents the *sine qua non* of a woman's life? Jane experiences Miss Temple's marriage as a disruption of their bond: Miss Temple's future husband "came between" (85) them, she writes. It seems as if there is no possibility for the continuation of that relationship once the teacher is married. Helen Burns, because of the intensity of her submission to a religion that demands self-denial, dies and is constructed in Jane's narrative as the epitome of an ideal friend. Jane's friendship with Mary Ann Wilson does, however, provide a point of comparison for the reader who is able to look at Jane's idealisation of Helen Burns far more critically than Jane is able to do. As characters in Jane's story,

both Miss Temple and Helen play out two roles assigned to women in nineteenth-century fiction. Miss Temple's marriage to a clergyman falls well within the boundaries set for her by society and the required enclosure in the happy ending of the Victorian novel. Helen's life and death represent the very real fate suffered by many Victorian women whose unquestioning acceptance of a cruel philosophy was justified by its frequent idealisation in fiction. Are we then to read these women as role models for the "motherless" Jane as Adrienne Rich suggests (1979: 91), or do they instead provide an implicit criticism of these choices because Jane rejects them?

Jane is consistently ambivalent about her relationships with Helen and Miss Temple and her relationship with Mary Ann Wilson provides the context within which to read this ambivalence. Her friendship with Mary Ann represents that moment in the autobiographical narrative where Jane's *pleasure*, as opposed to her sense of duty and high seriousness, disrupts the linear narrative of her *progress*. The narrative slows down and becomes, in chapter nine, a celebration of spring and the joys of being "outside" (76):

I discovered, too, that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in a prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies. (76)

For a brief moment in her autobiography Jane, many years later, recalls her own "pleasure" (76) and describes the freedom from constraint in an image that comments on Brocklehurst's rules that the students' hair should be "arranged closely, modestly, plainly" (64): "Lowood shook loose its tresses; it became all green, all flowery" (76). The abundance and excess of the imagery used is contrasted with the excessive and unnecessary loss of life inside the school: "Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time" (76). How then does the female autobiographer justify her "enjoyment" (76) of the circumstances that afford her opportunity for a friendship in which she

takes such pleasure? If the reader is ultimately the judge of the autobiographer's life and if that life is already made suspect by the gender and profession of the autobiographer, it becomes necessary for her to erase her illicit pleasure from the text with which she aims to gain approval rather than censure.

Jane does not completely erase Mary Ann from her narrative, but negates the friendship by comparing it with the far more "pure society" of Helen and by describing Mary Ann as "inferior" (78). Jane interrupts her memory of the joyful freedom of her friendship with Mary Ann abruptly, as if anticipating and forestalling criticism from her reader. Justifying her own "ignorance" (79) of the severity of Helen's illness, Jane addresses the reader, whose sympathies are assumed to be with the dying Helen, and confirms that: "though I am a defective being, with many faults and few redeeming points, yet I never tired of Helen Burns; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment as strong, tender, and respectful as any that ever animated my heart" (78).

The need for self-justification and the repression of pleasure are essential in Jane's autobiography because she must prove her moral authority as a female autobiographer who overcomes sexual temptation but who then returns to Rochester to become his wife. She must however also retain her credibility as a romantic heroine who feels and inspires passion, a task made more difficult because, unlike conventional romantic or sentimental heroines, Jane is "plain, small, and unattractive" (Gaskell 1985: 308). Harriet Martineau, in the obituary she wrote for Brontë, describes this determination to defy convention as morally inspired:

She once told her sisters that they were wrong – even morally wrong – in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours'. (Quoted in Gaskell 1985: 308)

Jane's autobiography must, consequently, portray her unconventionality as "interesting" (308) and desirable, yet it must convince the reader of the conventionality of her moral standards. The narrative Jane constructs is therefore one of *progress* towards legitimacy and enclosure in marriage, during which temptations along the way are valiantly overcome. Her ability to feel and express sexual desire constitutes one of these temptations.

Thornfield, Jane points out, resembles "some Bluebeard's castle" (108), implying that there is a little room tucked away somewhere containing the gruesome remains of Bluebeard's bride-victims. The next logical step in a series of houses representing varying degrees of patriarchal control and containment of women, Thornfield is the site where women's unruly sexuality, their irreverent laughter, their anger and their madness, are shut up "[i]n a room without a window", guarded by a woman who is employed by the master of the house and who wields the "master key" (295). Bertha Mason, Rochester's "bad, mad, and embruted" (295) wife, as he describes her, is, more than any other woman in Jane's narrative, a prisoner of a system that has used her as an object to be traded. She becomes, as a result, nothing more than a possession, which, when found unsatisfactory, is locked away by her owner-husband. Thornfield as ancestral house becomes the site of Rochester's own anger and vengeance, the place where he locks away the wife his father had "courted" (309) for him. As the youngest son in the hierarchy of the patriarchal family, he still feels the smart of being traded like a daughter would have been, and tells Jane that it was his father's

resolution to keep the property together; he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother, Rowland. Yet as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. He sought me a partner betimes. Mr Mason, a West India planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance . . . he learned from him that he could and would give [his daughter] a fortune of thirty-thousand pounds: that sufficed. (309)¹¹

Excluded from the transaction between his father and Mr Mason, Rochester clearly sees himself as the victim of both families and Bertha as the epitome of all the duplicitous and sexually degraded women who fill his life. Yet even if he had been duped into a marriage with a congenitally mad woman, he still benefits financially from this union and is able to live the life of a wealthy traveller in the capitals of Europe: "Provided with plenty of money, and the passport of an old name, I could choose my own society: no circles were closed to me" (315). His wife, in contrast, is closed-in, her company a paid "keeper"(314), removed from her parental home and country with neither money nor name.

Bertha loses her identity completely by becoming "Mrs Rochester". She is locked up as the "disgusting secret" (295) of the Rochesters – in his "narrative" (311) Rochester repeats the word "secret" three times in succession when describing Bertha's journey to, and imprisonment in, Thornfield. Whereas at Gateshead the "secret of the red-room" (14) was the death of the patriarch, his "miniature" (14) locked in a "secret" drawer to which Mrs Reed had the key, Thornfield's "secret" is locked in a "secret inner cabinet" (313), not dead, "only mad" (310), as Rochester had described Bertha's mother. Her existence is made even more secret when both Rochester's father and brother die, leaving Rochester the heir of the estate who shares the knowledge of her existence with only one other person, Bertha's brother, Richard Mason.

The title "Mrs Rochester" is the locus of immense anxiety in the text. As I mentioned above, in Rochester's numerous references to and narratives about women, he never once mentions his own mother, the original Mrs Rochester. When he however bestows this title on Jane in anticipation of their marriage, he does so relishing his future proprietorship over her and the right to change her from plain Jane to "young Mrs Rochester – Fairfax Rochester's girl-bride" with "jewels" and "satin and lace" (361). The significance of dress in an economy based on the treatment of women as objects to be traded again emerges here, as it also did when Brocklehurst's wife and daughters visited Lowood. Rochester's intended transformation of the barefoot girl of Lowood into the bejewelled Mrs Rochester draws attention to the fine line between the

wife as kept woman and the kept mistress – the two roles Jane is in danger of unwittingly conflating at this stage of her relationship with Rochester.¹²

Jane's awareness of the impending loss of autonomy is almost overwhelming on the night before the wedding when she splits her self as Jane Eyre off from what she is to become the following day: "not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not" (277). She is reluctant to attach the address cards Rochester had written to her luggage in the same way that the label, Mrs Rochester, would be attached to her, as his property:

'Mrs Rochester, – Hotel, London,' on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till tomorrow, . . . and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive, before I assigned to her all that property. (277)

Mrs Rochester does of course already exist and is "born" because of Jane's letter to her uncle who, in his turn, had told Bertha's brother, thus linking Jane and Bertha in a circuitous but significant way. On this night before the wedding, Jane seems to recognise a correlation between the "strange, wraith-like apparel" (277), her wedding dress and veil, and the reflection of herself in the red-room mirror, disembodied and unreal, a ghost. She shuts the clothes in the closet and goes outside in an attempt to escape confinement in a role she has consistently fought against. As if in response to Jane's psychic distress, Grace Poole lapses in her guard and Bertha comes to Jane's room where she shows herself in the mirror, wearing Jane's veil, as hideous and as frightening to Jane as the horrible face of an animal Virginia Woolf saw in her mirror-vision. For here the mirror as a patriarchal tool reflects the other side of the disembodied little girl at Gateshead: woman as so extremely embodied, so violently sexual, that she resembles "the foul German spectre – the Vampyre" (286), who saps men of their vitality and corrupts them. This illustrates, to return to Sidonie Smith's analysis of Woolf's "Sketch", the identification of the female "body with the animal world, with the low, the irrational, the contaminating and unruly, thus with the grotesque or carnivalesque" (1993: 89).

Jane's description of what she sees echoes the excesses of Rochester's when he tells her about Bertha. The apparently overwhelming terror of female physicality Bertha inspires does indeed put her in the realm of the fantastical if not mythological. This colossus of a woman with her "savage face", "tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back" (287) fills the text with her presence, even though she is "a minor character" as Laurence Lerner warns in his essay about her seductive powers for the critic (1989: 281).¹³ Her laughter, like that of Cixous' Medusa, explodes the veneer of propriety at Thornfield, the smooth flow of Jane's narrative and Rochester's authoritative voice:

Literally laughter breaks up the assembled and calm planes of the face; and as the movement of laughter breaks up the consolidated features of the face, laughter aligns the human with the animal, with the grotesque body. The effect of laughter on the body elides the gap between species and gestures toward the instability of boundaries separating one species from another, unhinging secure placements in hierarchies of meaning. It also breaks up the elegant, cool, controlled planes of statuesque representationalism, forcing the irrational through the lucid planes of reason and control. The sound itself breaks through the language of phallogentrism, a call from beyond, from the body, from elsewhere. Ultimately laughter breaks up the consolidations of a universalised, rational, unifying truth, destabilising foundational notions of truth by traducing the boundaries of binary opposites: control and abandon, reason and the irrational, body and mind. (Smith 1993: 166)

Bertha's presence at this point in the text clearly proves her lack of malice towards Jane and for that matter towards every woman at Thornfield, including her often-inebriated keeper, Grace. Bertha's violent *sorties* are directed only at Rochester and Richard Mason, her brother, a selectivity which seems to indicate a rational capacity to correctly judge the source of her misery. It also undermines Rochester's version of himself as the victim because Bertha is quite evidently a woman whose object status in the transaction between two men, her husband and her brother, has been taken to

its dehumanising extreme. Their silent pact keeps her imprisoned and it is only Jane's indirect intervention – her letter – which breaks this silence, allowing Bertha to assume her identity as Rochester's wife, whilst at the same time preventing Jane from losing her identity as Jane Eyre.

Bertha's Jane-like act of “dr[awing] the window curtain and look[ing] out” (286) – an act not surprising when one considers that she had been locked in a “cabinet” (313) without a window for “ten years” – confirms the kind of mutuality between the two characters many critics have noted. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, see Bertha as an aspect of Jane's own psyche: “Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead” (1984: 360). If Bertha represents both anger and sexuality, however, then surely the child-like aspect of this anger is negated and she becomes in a sense the angry-mother archetype – perhaps even comparable to Demeter – in her attempt to save Jane from marrying Rochester. Tearing the wedding veil Jane had described as a sign of “Fairfax Rochester's pride” and his “aristocratic tastes” (283), Bertha warns Jane not necessarily against sexual awakening, as the hymen analogue would seem to suggest, but against becoming sexually embodied with Rochester.

Apparently incapable of speech, she uses her body and symbols to awaken Jane's consciousness of the dangers facing her. If Jane's veil and dress “perhaps brought back vague reminiscences of her own bridal days” (314), as Rochester later surmises, then the violence of the act suggests that the memory is neither vague nor pleasant. Because only his version of what happened during their life together is given, Bertha's act becomes not necessarily threatening, but a poignant attempt at communication. The sexual nausea that underlies Rochester's descriptions of the affairs he had had, combined with the obvious sexual revulsion he felt and feels for his wife, provide a context within which to read her presence in Jane's room on the night before the wedding.¹⁴

Rochester describes Bertha as a woman with a “pigmy intellect” and “giant propensities”: “her nature wholly alien to [his]; her tastes obnoxious to

[him]; her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger" (310). Here he sets himself as the standard of rationality, the "higher" mind, civilisation, against which she is judged inferior because "low" (310), physical, animal. Yet he had desired Bertha once: "I was dazzled, stimulated; my senses were excited; . . . I thought I loved her" (309). Marriage and the consummation of this desire however result in self-loathing – "gross, grovelling, mole-eyed blockhead that I was!" – and, of course, "disgust" (309) for his now fully embodied, sexualised wife. Considering the absence of his mother from the tales he tells about women – and it is to be noted that Rochester's adventures are *all* about women; he does nothing else – Luce Irigaray's interlinking of "desire", "madness" and "the mother" (1991: 35), provides a possible reading of the dangers lurking here for Jane:

All desire is connected to madness. But apparently one desire has chosen to see itself as wisdom, moderation, truth, and has left the other to bear the burden of the madness it did not want to attribute to itself, recognise in itself.

This relationship between desire and madness comes into its own, for both man and woman, in the relationship with the mother. But all too often, man washes his hands of it and leaves it to woman – women. (1991: 35)

In the narrative of self-justification Rochester tells Jane after their aborted marriage ceremony, this "relationship between desire and madness" (35) and the mother is made explicit when Rochester constructs Bertha's mother as the source of madness that contaminates her children, especially her daughter. Bertha, Rochester tells Jane, is "the true daughter of an infamous mother" (Brontë 1987a: 310) because, according to him, she inherits from her mother every possible excess from drunkenness to sexual profligacy.¹⁵ There is no clear reason why he should feel such intense disgust for a woman who is, as he says, "only mad; and shut up in a lunatic asylum" (310). Rochester, however, appears to be driven by a desire to construct both

Bertha and her mother as the extreme Other in the narrative he tells of himself and he uses the signifier of race to do so. Susan Meyer suggests that:

When Rochester exclaims of Bertha that . . . 'Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!' he locates both madness and drunkenness in his wife's maternal line, which is again emphatically and ambiguously labelled 'Creole'. By doing so, he associates that line with two of the most common stereotypes associated with blacks in the nineteenth century. (1991: 164)

Rochester directs his hatred at the mother and her daughter, who were not the agents of his deception but rather victims of the same system. This suggests a process of transference that can be seen in all Rochester's narratives about women, and can be read within the context of the erasure of his own mother from his life/stories.

Bertha's warning is therefore not misplaced, considering that Rochester is attracted to Jane because she is physically the antithesis of Bertha and Blanche Ingram, who are both "tall, dark, and majestic" (Brontë 1987a: 309). His insistent reference to Jane as "little", a "[c]hildish and slender creature" (317), a "curious sort of bird" (140), and the numerous references to her as somehow supernatural, "elfish" (263), a "fairy" (270), and his "good angel" (319) would seem to suggest an attempt to prevent Jane from achieving a full sense of herself as sexually embodied, not "a doll" (271), but human, a woman.¹⁶ Jane openly rebels against this habit, telling him: "I am no angel . . . and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself" (262). Furthermore, Jane's orphaned status clearly appeals to Rochester because he recognises it as both liberating her from the strictures of patriarchal laws and conventions, but also making her vulnerable precisely because she therefore lacks their protection. When she persists in refusing his impassioned arguments to make her his mistress, even though she loves him, he bursts out:

And what a distortion in your judgement, what a perversity in your ideas, is proved by your conduct! Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than

to transgress a mere human law – no man being injured by the breach? For you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear to offend by living with me. (321)

From the moment Jane accepts his marriage proposal, Rochester envisages a relationship directly the opposite of the one of equality Jane asserts and with which he agrees on the night that he proposes (256). As I have suggested above, he relishes the role of master, which he of course is, as she is the governess. It is a power imbalance that will increase when she becomes his wife/mistress, dependent on him for all her needs. It is also one that recalls her position at Gateshead as a child entirely dependent on others who could withdraw their dubious protection at will.

Jane's child-dreams (284) and Bertha's close association with them could therefore signify the eruptions of the suppressed anxiety and anger Jane's realistic narrative cannot contain. They become, like Bertha's laughter, the *sorties* of the text itself, escaping from the confining nineteenth-century plot that allows no space for the speech of female anger, an anger inextricably linked with dependence and powerlessness. Mary Poovey, for instance, suggests that the children in the dreams "metaphorically represent the dependence that defined women's place in bourgeois society" (1989: 246):

What Jane's dreams of children reveal, then, in their content, their placement, and their form, is that the helplessness enforced by the governess' dependent position – along with the frustration, self-denial, and maddened, thwarted rage that accompanies it – marks every middle-class woman's life because she is not allowed to express (or possess) the emotions her dependence provokes. (246)

There is little doubt that Jane's suppressed anxiety and anger in relation to Rochester result from numerous examples of his masterful behaviour. One such instance is the obvious discrepancy between Jane's "five shillings" and Rochester's "fifty pounds" on the day she leaves for Gateshead when he makes a game of paying her "wages" (226).¹⁷ It is however the proposal scene

that is the most significant example of Rochester's masterful manipulation of Jane's love and her financial dependence. Pretending that he is planning to marry Blanche, Rochester proceeds to cruelly bait Jane into confessing her love for him. He threatens to send her off to Ireland, as if it is his right to decide where she should go and for whom she should work. Then, when she breaks down and confesses that "it strikes [her] with terror and anguish to feel [she] absolutely must be torn from [him] forever", he tells her: "No: you must stay!" (253) At last, however, Jane rebels against this emotional abuse and asserts her equality with him:

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? – You think wrong – I have as much soul as you, – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: – it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, – as we are! (255)

Only later, when Jane pointedly asks why he took "such pains" (264) to convince her of his intention to marry Blanche, does he unashamedly admit his strategy to set himself up as the desired object in a triangle figuring Jane and Blanche as rivals: "Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end" (265). Instead of gleefully celebrating her victory over her rival as Rochester's scheme would have it, her first question to him is: "Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram's feelings, sir?" and to call his behaviour "a scandalous disgrace" (265). Jane is already aware (at least subconsciously) of the triangulation Rochester orchestrates when she returns to Thornfield from Gateshead. This awareness is signalled when she dreams of Blanche "closing the gates of Thornfield against me and pointing me out another road; and Mr Rochester

looked on with his arms folded – smiling sardonically, as it seemed, at both her and me” (245).

This triangulation is the extension of a game played right from the moment Rochester returns to Thornfield with his entourage of friends that includes Blanche Ingram and her mother. These guests represent the Gateshead value-system and Blanche is there primarily to use all the skills at her disposal to “charm” (188) Rochester into marrying her. Rochester will eventually manipulate this role to test her by spreading a “rumour” that he was not really as wealthy as it appeared, which results in “coldness both from her and her mother” (257). He forgets, of course, that he too participated in just such a transaction when he married Bertha. At this point, however, Jane observes the interplay between them and recognises that Rochester “was going to marry [Blanche], for family, perhaps political reasons; because her rank and connections suited him” (188). She withholds judgement from both because they are “acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles” (189).

In contrast, Jane chooses a different set of principles for herself. She juxtaposes the marriage-market system based on wealth, position, expediency, with the freedom to choose her future spouse: “It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like [Rochester], I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love” (189). In refusing to make herself or love a commodity, she is of course following the example of her mother. Unlike her mother who married a poor man below her in the class hierarchy, Jane loves the wealthy master of Thornfield who apparently belongs to a class above herself. Jane’s class status is however not below Rochester’s because she is related to the Reeds, a family on par with the Rochesters, and she is an Eyre, a family “as much gentry as the Reeds are” (93) as Bessie tells Jane on her departure from Lowood. This lineage thus makes of Jane “a proper lady” (93).

Because Jane’s own value-system contradicts the principles of exchange, she does not make Blanche her rival and she therefore resists the triangulation Rochester orchestrates. She instead considers Blanche “a mark

beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling" (187). The "seeming paradox" (187) Jane herself points out, is "seeming" only because Jane does not use the criteria of the marriage-market to evaluate Blanche as an object. She considers Blanche "inferior" (187) precisely because Blanche behaves like an object, her life a performance, whilst she lacks any real substance:

She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books; she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity: tenderness and truth were not in her. Too often she betrayed this, by the undue vent she gave to a spiteful antipathy she had conceived against little Adèle: pushing her away with some contumelious epithet if she happened to approach her; sometimes ordering her from the room, and always treating her with coldness and acrimony. (188)

Jane is not immune to jealousy. She acknowledges that "[i]f Blanche Ingram had been a good and noble woman, endowed with force, fervour, kindness, sense" she would have felt both "jealousy and despair" (188) had Rochester fallen in love with her. Jane, for instance, sees Blanche's "coldness and acrimony" (188) towards Adèle as an indication of her unworthiness as a rival, perhaps because it is so similar to the way in which Mrs Reed treated her. Rochester, of course, also treats Adèle with a sarcasm verging on contempt, calling her a "genuine daughter of Paris" (130) in the same way that he will later call Bertha "the true daughter of an infamous mother" (310).

Jane's own relationship with Adèle in a sense duplicates the Bessie-Jane relationship at Gateshead because Jane's natural empathy with Adèle is severely circumscribed by Rochester's presence. Contrary to his intention, the knowledge of Adèle's origin makes Jane far more sympathetic and indulgent, even though she also notices Adèle's "superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother" (146). Jane seems unable to escape the influence of Rochester's representations and she thus fails to recognise Adèle's wisdom when, in response to Rochester's moon fantasy, she says: "She [Jane] is far

better as she is . . . besides, she would get tired of living with only you in the moon. If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you" (269). Adèle has knowledge that Jane does not have because she had observed Rochester's relationship with her mother at first hand and is therefore able to contradict the story he tells about her mother. The song she sings to Jane about "a forsaken lady . . . [who] resolves to meet the false one that night at a ball, and prove to him by the gaiety of her demeanour how little his desertion had affected her" (103) may be her attempt to do so.¹⁸ In the same way that Jane threatened the façade of respectability at Gateshead because she could tell the truth, Adèle threatens to undermine Rochester's narrative and, like Mrs Reed had tried to discredit Jane, Rochester attempts to discredit Adèle.

He effectively interrupts the growing bond between Jane and Adèle, whom he sees as "a restraint" (268), an inconvenience to be sent "to school" (253, 304), because he wants to keep Jane as his own companion. Yet on the day Jane leaves Thornfield, as on the morning of her wedding day, the symbolic bond between her and her "darling Adèle" (324) emerges as also emotionally strong:

I remember Adèle clung to me as I left her: I remember I kissed her as I loosened her little hands from my neck; and I cried over her with strange emotion, and quitted her because I feared my sobs would break her still sound repose. She seemed the emblem of my past life; and he, I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day. (289)

At this point in Jane's narrative, marriage to Rochester implies a severance of the bond between Jane and Adèle because she represents Jane's "past life" whereas Rochester is her "future day" (289). However, when Jane does eventually marry Rochester, she maintains the bond with Adèle on her own terms. After her marriage to Rochester, Jane rescues Adèle from the school where he had sent her. Finding the child "pale and thin . . . not happy" and "frantic with joy" (455) to see her, Jane reverses her own childhood deprivation and lack of mothering by becoming a good mother to Adèle:

I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe, for a child of her age: I took her home with me. . . . I sought out a new school conducted on a more indulgent system; and near enough to permit of my visiting her often, and bringing her home sometimes. I took care she should never want for anything that could contribute to her comfort. (455)

The view expressed by Annette Tranley that “the attitudes [Jane] expresses at the end of her autobiography about the young Adèle . . . sound disturbingly like the attitudes Mrs Reed once held about the young Jane Eyre” (1982: 59) is thus surprising. It is Rochester, rather than Jane, who re-enacts Mrs Reed’s cruelty and dishonesty.¹⁹ Jane subverts the wicked stepmother stereotype by making Adèle her “pleasing and obliging companion” (Brontë 1987a: 456). Unlike Mrs Reed who could see nothing good in Jane, Jane praises Adèle whom she describes as “docile, good-tempered and well-principled” (456).

But before Jane can mother Adèle and prevent her life from imitating Jane’s own, she has to withstand the temptation of becoming Rochester’s mistress, displacing Bertha, and replacing his other mistresses, including Adèle’s mother. Thornfield thus represents the site of Jane’s choice against the symbolic matricide that Luce Irigaray sees as at the root of Western culture. She does not “take the place of the mother in an aggressive rivalry” (Whitford 1991: 182) as the “patriarchal contract” requires of women when they enter into the male economy as objects. However, Jane does not entirely escape Rochester’s influence. As in fairy tales where the heroine either forgets or falls asleep for a while, Jane succumbs to Rochester’s charm and in the process fails to pay attention to the warnings the women in this Bluebeard’s castle whisper or insinuate with their laughter. Jane, for instance, does not recognise Grace Poole’s warning to lock her door at night (after Bertha sets fire to Rochester’s bed) as a perhaps sincere wish to protect her from harm. This is clearly not surprising because she thinks that Grace is the source of both the laughter and the fire, since both Mrs Fairfax and Rochester have told her that this is so. Thus she sees only “her miraculous self-possession and most

inscrutable hypocrisy" (157) and ignores the basic good sense in Grace's advice.

Jane's belief in Rochester also disrupts the relationship between herself and Mrs Fairfax. Jane is offended by her remark that "[g]entlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (268). Mrs Fairfax is undoubtedly concerned about the class difference as well as about the "twenty years of difference in [their] ages" (267). Yet there is also a sense of almost grandmotherly concern for Jane's wellbeing, quite apart from these issues. Jane, she says, is

so young, and so little acquainted with men, I wished to *put you on your guard* . . . There are times when, for your sake, I have been a little uneasy at his marked preference, and have wished to *put you on your guard*: but I did not like to suggest even the possibility of wrong. I knew such an idea would shock, perhaps offend you; and you were so discreet, and so thoroughly modest and sensible, I hoped you might be trusted to protect yourself. (267, emphasis added)

It is not clear whether Mrs Fairfax knows that Bertha is married to Rochester and whether this motivates her warning to Jane. It could simply be that, like the servants at Thornfield (167), she knows that Grace looks after a madwoman brought there by Rochester and draws conclusions for herself (129). Jane fails to heed her warning and suffers the consequences. It is an example of what Janet Todd describes as the destruction of "the tenuous lines of support joining the virtuous woman to her friends" (1980: 337), making her particularly vulnerable to male exploitation.²⁰ Jane's restlessness prior to Rochester's arrival at Thornfield, her desire for "more intercourse with [her] kind" (Brontë 1987a: 110) instead of the blandness of Mrs Fairfax and Adèle's company, makes her particularly susceptible to the attractions of a worldly man like Rochester. If Rochester then also in part resembles Mr Reed, the only man ever to nurture and protect Jane, the attraction would certainly be so much greater. It consequently does not take Jane long to assert her kinship with him.

The ease of his manner freed me from painful restraint: the friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him. I felt at times, as if he were my relation, rather than my master . . . I ceased to pine after kindred. (147)

She is however “nettled” when Mrs Fairfax points out the father-daughter relationship this would obviously imply when she says: “He might almost be your father” (267). For Jane, the implied father-daughter relationship clearly signifies the essential inequality of their relationship. Like a daughter, Jane is dependent, inexperienced, and powerless in relation to the father figure, a position not very different from the one she held in relation to Mrs Reed as the patriarch *manqué*. As was necessary in that situation, Jane now has to resist the confinement kinship, whether biological or symbolic, would imply. The night after she refuses to become Rochester's mistress, Jane subconsciously connects her refusal to become the seduced daughter in this instance with the similar threat at Gateshead. She is “transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead” (323).

The false father who lacks “the attribute of stainless truth” (299) must be resisted because, like the patriarchal mother, he demands from Jane a sacrifice of selfhood she cannot give. A hair's breadth away from falling down the abyss of sexual and moral compromise, Jane once again escapes from the patriarchal home. At this crucial stage of her journey her *real* mother appears in a vision, “not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure” (324), ‘owning’ the always disowned and rejected Jane and warning her: “My daughter, flee temptation!” to which Jane responds: “Mother, I will” (324).

The appearance of this “heavenly mother” (324) – as opposed to the heavenly father Jane prays to after her discovery of Rochester's deception (299) – prefigures Jane's purgatory in and rebirth from “the universal mother, Nature” (327). She leaves her field of thorns and becomes “the poor orphan child” of Bessie's song, wandering in the “wilderness” (329) around Whitcross without money or possessions. At this stage of her journey Jane is “absolutely destitute” (327) and, if not actually fallen, then certainly compromised by the sexual nature of her relationship with Rochester. Unlike the defiant little girl

who left Gateshead Hall refusing to absorb the view of herself as bad, Jane's loss of innocence is apparent in the perception of herself as compromised and therefore suspect. Her sense of herself as invaded and deceived thus coincides with the voice of society judging her for her participation in the transgression, in the same way that she was, for instance, punished for defending herself against John Reed.

The "vague dread" of any male presence on the moors where she rests – she fears "some sportsman or poacher discover[ing]" (327) her, "[i]f a gust of wind swept the waste, [she] looked up, fearing it was the rush of a bull; if a plover whistled, [she] imagined it a man" (327) – suggests the anxiety of sexual vulnerability such a fall into sexual consciousness instils in the woman alone. Although Jane has again escaped confinement in the patriarchal room, the burden of sexual knowledge she carries makes her deeply conscious of how she is perceived by the society that would condemn her as fallen:

I wish no eye to see me now: strangers would wonder what I am doing, lingering here at the sign-post, evidently objectless and lost. I might be questioned: I could give no answer but what would sound incredible and excite suspicion. Not a tie holds me to human society at this moment – not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are – none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose. (327)

Unlike the rooms and buildings that represent the confining structures of patriarchy, Nature here represents, as it does in *Shirley*, a female space: "an ally of the woman hero, keeping her in touch with her selfhood, a kind of talisman that enables her to make her way through the alienations of male society" (Pratt 1989: 21). In contrast to the world of men where "cold charity must be entreated" and "reluctant sympathy importuned", Nature is the "mother [who] would lodge [Jane] without money and without price" (Brontë 1987a: 327). Nature is therefore the antithesis of the value-system that judges Jane as nothing because she has "no money" (11) and which is based on trade or exchange. For the "wildly unmothered" Jane (Rich 1977: 226), the "wilderness"

(Brontë 1987a: 328) around Whitcross accordingly becomes the “benign and good” mother whose love is unconditional: “I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness” (328).

When Jane’s hunger drives her to try to find work in the village the next day, the “evident suspicion” (332) of the women there confirms Jane’s fears of “rejection, insult” (328). Like Lucy Snowe in *Villette* when she arrives “alone in great London” (Brontë 1987b: 107) after Miss Marchmont’s death, Jane has to rely on the intangible and fragile distinction of being “a lady” (Brontë 1987a: 330) to sustain and protect her. However, it is precisely because she is a lady *alone* in a strange place that she is treated with suspicion and not welcomed. The women “quite gently and civilly . . . shut [her] out” (332) and, in desperation, she eventually returns to “the hill” (335) where she does, however, not find the welcoming “hollow” that had cradled her the previous night. All around Jane the ground is “level” (335) as if Nature, the good mother, will not now become the tomb of the child she had nourished the night before. From the hill that had been “the breast” (329) she had “nestled” against, Jane sees the light of the “little moorland home” (349) that belongs to her true family.

This stage in her narrative is presented as a metaphorical rebirth. She is stripped of all her possessions and contact with her “fellow-creatures” (327), goes through a period of purgatory during which she is nourished by a benevolent mother, Nature, taken in by the Rivers family where she assumes the alias, “Jane Elliott” (341), awakens after “three days and nights” (343) to find that all her clothing, even her “very shoes and stockings were purified and rendered presentable” (344) and that all “traces of the bog were removed” from them. Jane represents herself at this point as someone who has shed a part of herself, her “clothes hung loose on [her]”, and who has gone through a process of cleansing and is “once more clean and respectable-looking – no speck of dirt, no trace of the disorder [she] so hated, and which seemed so to degrade [her], [was] left” (344). There is a clear attempt here on the part of the autobiographer to establish her dissociation from the “disorder” (344) of her

relationship with Rochester. To retain her position as a moral authority, Jane has to convince her nineteenth-century reader, who expects the autobiography to present an exemplary life, that her experience at Thornfield was a test of character which she has overcome and which, more importantly, had not corrupted her.

As the narrative moves towards closure, the structure of Jane's autobiography as traditional *Bildungsroman*, a "tale of the progressive travelling of a life from troubled or stifled beginnings; in which obstacles are overcome and the true self actualised or revealed" (Stanley 1992: 11), asserts itself to contain, it seems, the contradictory impulses of the text. The tensions however remain apparent because, although Jane mimics the linear and individualist drive of the male autobiographer, her agenda as a female autobiographer contradicts and subverts the ideology of exclusion and erasure of the feminine that is typical of the traditional, male-authored text. Throughout her narrative, Jane inscribes a complex autobiographical subject who, as Adrienne Rich suggests, "feels so unalterably herself" (1977: 91), but who is also "more than 'individual': unique in one sense, but also closely articulating with the lives of others . . . a single hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself enmeshed with other lives which give hers the meaning it has" (Stanley 1992: 14).²¹

The lives that Jane includes as shaping influences on her subjectivity, whether negatively or positively, are female and they are therefore, like Jane herself, peripheral to the dominant group from within which the universal/male subject speaks. Jane thus both decentres the traditional autobiographical male subject and she also privileges the marginalised identities of women who are, according to the nineteenth-century construction of gender identity, associated with the body because "female identity inheres in woman's embodiment as procreator and nurturer" (Smith 1993: 11). Woman is thus granted "an essential selfhood, but not the selfhood of the universal human/male subject" (11) because, as Judith Butler argues,

[b]y defining women as 'Other', men are able through the shortcut of definition to dispose of their bodies, to make themselves other than their bodies – a symbol potentially of human decay and transience, of limitation generally – and to make their bodies other than themselves. From this belief that the body is Other, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that others *are* their bodies, while the masculine 'I' is the noncorporeal soul. The body rendered as Other – the body repressed or denied and, then, projected – re-emerges for this 'I' as the view of others as essentially body. (Quoted in Smith 1993: 11)

This disembodied "I" of the universal/male subject stands at the centre of autobiography which, as Sidonie Smith suggests, "consolidated its status as one of the West's master discourses, a discourse that has served to power and define centres, margins, boundaries, and grounds of action in the West" (18). Thus the traditional autobiographer who "offer[s] an official account for the community" (19) celebrates and affirms "individuality and separateness while erasing personal and communal interdependencies. As he does so he re-enacts the erasure of the feminine that facilitates male entrance into the public realm of words, power, and meaning" (19).

In the final section of Jane Eyre's autobiography, St John Rivers enacts the plot of the ideal nineteenth-century disembodied male hero-adventurer whose self-denial and missionary zeal lead him on a journey away from England to India where he "labours for his race" (Brontë 1987a: 457). This journey of the colonising male subject, or "indefatigable pioneer" (457) as Jane describes him, ends with St John's desired mystical union with "Lord Jesus" (458) in death. Jane uses his "last letter" (458), that expresses this desire, to close her own narrative and in so doing draws attention to the gendering of plot structure. Her inscription of St John's "unmarried" (458) state is here brought into stark contrast with the marriages of both Jane and the Rivers sisters. The plot structures Jane presents here, like pictures at an exhibition, represent through their very proximity the female autobiographer's enclosure within the frame of traditional domesticity, whereas the male hero escapes precisely this domesticity associated with the feminine. St John appears to enact the "tale [Jane's] imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of

incident, life, fire, feeling" (110) at Thornfield. Jane's life, on the other hand, appears to conform to what she condemns as one which "confine[s]" (111) women to "making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (111).

The ambiguity of this closure anticipates that of *Villette* and raises a number of questions. Is Jane's inclusion of St John's letter a sincere capitulation to the plot of male heroism that relegates her life story to the realm of marriage and motherhood, or could it be read as yet another strategy employed to distract attention from the autobiographer's subversive criticism of the erasure of the feminine (and, more specifically, female homosociality) from the centre of the text? Does St John's voice replace hers or is her voice confirmed as the narrator of both her story and his? Is survival not perhaps the supreme achievement for Jane Eyre who, like Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, lives to tell the tale and therefore controls the narrative?

St John's role in Jane's narrative is a structurally complex one. Her use of his letter at closure as an example of the traditional heroic plot of the male hero's solitary achievement must be seen to contrast not only with the traditional female plot of marriage and motherhood, but also to recall the plot of female community and sisterhood that challenges both these conventions. When Jane arrives at Moore-House she looks through the window of the cottage and sees Diana and Mary Rivers at their studies. Even though Jane "had nowhere seen such faces as theirs", she "seemed intimate with every lineament" (336) and later discovers in Mary and Diana Rivers "a perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles" (354) and shares with them an "intimacy" (355). This does not, however, "extend to" (355) St John. The sense of unworthiness that Jane felt in relation to Helen Burns and Miss Temple is here transformed into a relationship in which their "natures dovetailed: mutual affection – of the strongest kind – was the result" (355). When Jane learns that she has inherited from her uncle and that the two women are indeed her cousins, her first thought is to re-establish this domestic situation that has been interrupted by the departure of the sisters to work as governesses. She tells St John: "I am resolved I will have a home and

connections. I like Moore-House, and I will live at Moore-House; I like Diana, and Mary, and I will attach myself for life to Diana and Mary" (391).

The joy with which Jane prepares Moore-House for the return of Diana and Mary is, however, marred by St John's censure of "sisterly society" and its "domestic endearments and household joys" (395). He admonishes Jane for the "disproportionate fervour with which [she] throw[s her]self into commonplace home pleasures" (395). When the sisters return, he does not keep "his promise of treating [her] like his sisters; he continually made little, chilling differences between [them]" (400) because he has, it soon becomes clear, structured his own plot for Jane's life. His motive becomes apparent when he interrupts Jane's study of German with Diana and tells her to "learn Hindostanee" (402). Soon after, he tells her:

God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must – shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you – not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service. (407)

The idyllic community of sisters Jane had anticipated now becomes for her a nightmare world from which she feels unable to escape because she experiences St John's influence as "an awful charm" (406) to which she submits as to "a freezing spell" (402). He separates her from his sisters, who hope that his marriage to Jane will keep him in England and who therefore do not intervene to draw Jane back into their sphere. It is St John's monopoly of Jane's time and company, and the persistent emotional abuse that coincides with it, that eventually leads to the failure of the dream of female community, which is shown to be powerless to protect Jane. Both Diana and Mary are implicated in the plot that privileges marriage over sisterhood and they thus condone, quite unwittingly perhaps, the sexual repression St John demands from Jane. Her body becomes the colonised space that is "claimed" (424) by him, but which is also, just at the point when she is most in danger of succumbing to his power, the source of her rebellion against him. In this scene

that recalls the physical and emotional intensity of Jane's response to John Reed's attack on her, she experiences a

feeling [that] was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake . . . the flesh quivered on my bones. (424)

It is of course at this point that she hears Rochester's voice calling her and she is thus strengthened to resist St John: "It was *my* turn to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force" (425, emphasis in original), she states in a tone that has been absent from her narrative for the duration of her relationship with St John. The voice Jane hears is not a supernatural manifestation but rather the result of profound psychic distress, similar to that which she suffered at Gateshead Hall. Jane consistently describes her experience of psychological stress in terms of intense physical sensations. These in turn lead to "involuntary" (17) acts that facilitate her escape from unbearable situations. In the red-room "a sound filled [her] ears, which [she] deemed the rushing of wings" because she had frightened herself with a revenge fantasy in which "Mr Reed's spirit" (17) returns to avenge her. She specifically fears that "any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort [her]" (17). Years later, when faced with John Reed's double, St John Rivers, who enacts a similar negation of her autonomy and sexuality (they both also refuse to treat Jane like a sister), Jane does indeed hear "a preternatural voice". This voice originates from her wish to escape and is clearly informed by her desire to be reunited with Rochester who represents, like Mr Reed did, a fantasy of the good father. Both men are obviously unable to rescue her in reality and her fantasy must therefore be read as an interior assertion of her own desire, her own "nature" (425), which is invoked here, as it is throughout the text, as feminine: "She was roused, and did – no miracle – but her best" (425).

Jenny Sharpe's argument that Jane's "agency is underwritten by a male voice" (1993: 54) is therefore true to the extent that it recalls Jane to the

traditional plot of marriage and motherhood. Although Jane is motivated by her own desire, Rochester's voice calls her into the enclosure of an Oedipal triangle in which she figures as the mother of his son and from within which she writes her autobiography "ten years" (Brontë 1987a: 456) later. The contradictory impulses of the narrative evident here, represent yet another example of the "double duty of voicing and silencing ideological contradictions" (Poovey 1988: 124) referred to above. Jane's narrative, whilst conforming to the domestic ideology of enclosure, which is represented by her marriage to Rochester, however also subverts it by disclosing the hidden mechanics of patriarchal plotting in the Victorian novel. As a female autobiographer, Jane constructs a story of her life, which consistently refers to and includes the lives of other women. However, female homosocial relationships are not idealised, but represented as immensely complex and varied. Bertha Mason's role in this woman-centred narrative is obviously a particularly complex one.

Jane's return to Thornfield and her subsequent marriage to the wounded Rochester at Ferndean is, as many critics have pointed out, predicated on Bertha's suicide. Gayatri Spivak's analysis of Antoinette/Bertha's death in Jean Rhys' reworking of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, provides a useful way into the contradictions that are apparent in Jane's construction of Bertha. Spivak argues that when, "at the very end of the book" (1997: 902), "Antoinette/Bertha can say: 'Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do'" (902), she recognises herself as a fictional construct in "the England of Brontë's novel" (902):

In this fictive England, she must play her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the coloniser. At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation. (1997: 902)

Rhys' representation of Antoinette's awareness of her role in Brontë's text is very similar to Brontë's construction of her narrator as an autobiographer whose narrative must be read as a retrospective evaluation of events and people who are included or excluded for a particular reason. Whereas Rhys' modernist text plays with intertextuality to critique Brontë's representation of "the woman from the colonies" (902), Brontë creates a female autobiographer who negotiates the great patriarchal house of nineteenth-century fiction in an attempt to disclose its silencing and imprisonment of women. Even though Brontë is patently unable to tell the Other story as Rhys attempts to do, Jane's autobiography includes "the woman from the colonies" who is "sacrificed . . . for her sister's consolidation" (902), because in so doing she discloses to public view the way in which this woman has been locked away as the "disgusting secret" (Brontë 1987a: 295) of nineteenth century British fiction. As a *sortie*, Bertha's final act of self-destruction is thus both an act of escape from imprisonment in the male-authored/narrated house of nineteenth-century fiction and an attempt to destroy it as an example of patriarchal structures of control.

Jane's autobiographical narrative, written as it is from within the structural confines of the Victorian novel, enacts a similar, though less self-destructive, onslaught on patriarchal ideology. The narrative performs a series of *sorties* that destabilise the conventional linear progression of the nineteenth-century novel, which usually ends in marriage for the female protagonist. In order to subvert the literary conventions that inscribe patriarchal ideology, Jane uses narrative strategies that rely on a complex mimicry of tradition. This enables her to speak as a female autobiographer within the public (masculine) domain of literature, whilst maintaining her domestic (feminine) status as a "proper lady" (93). From this position, she tells the story of her life as an orphan and a governess, consistently foregrounding the shaping influence of her relationships with other women. If Jane's project is therefore to "write her self" and to "write about women" (Cixous 1981: 245), the autobiographical narrative she constructs also exposes the fundamental hostility towards female homosocial relationships, which informs the Victorian novel's enshrinement of

heterosexual marriage and motherhood as the only acceptable roles for women.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ I am indebted to Poovey's excellent analysis of class and gender construction in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*.

² In the case of Pamela the letters are written to her parents.

³ Luce Irigaray also uses the term "mimicry" to describe the subversive potential of such a stance:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to locate the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it . . . to make 'visible' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: recovering a possible operation of the feminine in language. (Quoted in Whitford 1991: 71)

⁴ I use the term here in imitation of Irigaray's "*mimétisme*" which Margaret Whitford explains as "usually translated mimeticism, com[ing] from the domain of animal ethology and mean[ing] 'camouflage' or 'protective colouring'" (1991: 72).

⁵ The figure of the governess is, of course, central to both Dora's case and Freud's own sexual development as seen in the Freud-Fliess letters. However, whereas Freud experienced his relationship with his nursemaid as a source of sexual inadequacy and frustration, the relationship between Dora and her governess provides Dora with sexual knowledge and hence power to resist Herr K's attempted seduction at the lake. She recognises his seduction narrative as exactly the same as that used by him to seduce the governess. Even though her rejection of him can be read as a rejection of the implied class insult because he presumes to treat her as he had treated the governess, Dora's ability to recognise his intention relies entirely on the intimate knowledge gained as a result of her relationship with the governess. Dora's resistance to containment within what Philip Rieff has described as a "charmless circle" of "a sick daughter, [who] has a sick father, who has a sick mistress, who has a sick husband, who proposes himself to the sick daughter as her lover" (quoted in Malcolm 1992: 24) results in her analysis by Freud and eventual rejection of him.

⁶ See, for example: Meyer, S. 1991. "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of Jane Eyre." *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism*. Eds. Arac, J. and Ritvo, H. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press) 159 – 183; Plasa, C. 1994. "'Silent Revolt': Slavery and the politics of metaphor in *Jane Eyre*." *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*. Eds. Plasa, C. and Ring, B. (London/New York: Routledge) 64 – 93; Perera, S. 1991. "'Fit Only for a Seraglio': The Discourse of Oriental Misogyny in *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*." *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens*. (New York: Columbia University Press) 79 – 102; Sharpe, J. 1993. "The Rise of Women in an Age of Progress: *Jane Eyre*." *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 168 – 174.

⁷ John's cruelty to animals and general destructiveness – "he twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory"

(Brontë 1987a: 15) – is similar to the cruelties of Master Tom Bloomfield in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*.

⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, in her *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, mentions a similar distortion in a value-system which punishes the victim instead of the aggressor: A young girl visiting her pregnant sister is seduced by her brother-in-law, and cast out by her father when it is discovered that she is pregnant, whilst the "remaining members of the family, elder sisters even, went on paying visits to the wealthy brother-in-law's house, as if his sin was not a hundred-fold more scarlet than the poor young girl's" (1985: 92).

⁹ This birth into consciousness through an awareness of pain echoes Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra*: "Give us back our suffering, we cry to heaven in our hearts – suffering rather than indifferentism; for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better pain than paralysis!" (quoted in Showalter 1985: 65).

¹⁰ "Sometimes I thought the tomb [of the nun and Dr. John's letters] unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks" (Brontë 1987b: 451).

¹¹ What he does not tell Jane, in the end, is that he inherited the estate by default, "since the death of his brother without a will, left him master of the estate" (Brontë 1987a: 129), information Mrs Fairfax had given Jane shortly after she first meets Rochester.

¹² Twenty-nine years after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot, in *Daniel Deronda*, uses the transfer of Grandcourt's diamond jewelry from his mistress, Lydia Glasher, who is also the mother of his children, to his new wife, Gwendolen Harleth, on their wedding day (chapter 31), to make this point even more explicitly than Brontë does.

¹³ At least he does not refer to her as the "sex-crazed madwoman" as does John Maynard, perpetuating the stereotype Rochester creates and perhaps even illustrating the kind of anxiety Bertha still manages to awaken (1984: 126).

¹⁴ One's reading of *Jane Eyre* is of course inevitably shaped by Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the way in which Bertha/Antoinette is given voice in this text.

¹⁵ This view of the mother-daughter relationship as a chain of disease and excess is also evident in Rochester's description of Adèle and her mother Céline. Jane's view of Adèle, though less extreme, indicates a similar prejudice: "I took her on my knee; kept her there an hour, allowing her to prattle as she liked: not rebuking even some little freedoms and trivialities into which she was apt to stray when much noticed; and which betrayed in her a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother" (Brontë 1987a: 146).

¹⁶ In fact, it is almost as if he does not quite see her as she really is the day after the proposal when he describes her as “[t]his little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes” (260). Jane wryly comments: “I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, *I suppose*” (260, emphasis added).

¹⁷ The correlation between the fallen woman and the governess is also clear in the context of payment for services rendered. Both the prostitute and governess are paid for the services they provide, services that the wife renders without cash changing hands.

¹⁸ Adèle consistently refuses to believe Rochester’s stories about Jane. When he tells her that Jane is “a fairy” (270) she “evinced a fund of genuine French scepticism: denominating Mr Rochester ‘un vrai menteur,’ and assuring him that she made no account whatever of his ‘Contes de fée,’ and that ‘du reste, il n’y avait pas de fées, et quand même il y en avait,’ she was sure they would never appear to him, nor ever give him rings, or offer to live with him on the moon” (270).

¹⁹ Rochester has also been compared with Mr Reed by some critics. John Maynard, for instance, bases his comparison on the age difference, and “their common possession of great black dogs” (1984: 103).

²⁰ Todd here discusses the relationship between Madame de Tourvel and Madame de Merteuil in Laclos’s *Dangerous Liaisons*, saying that by “seeing themselves as exceptional” and “rejecting female ties,” the two women “stood alone against Valmont” who is consequently “rendered omnipotent in the context of his male society” (1980: 340).

²¹ Liz Stanley here refers to autobiographies by twentieth-century British writers like Carolyn Steedman and Anne Oakley.

Chapter 3

“But if I feel, may I *never* express?”: Lucy Snowe’s desire as heresy in *Villette*.

I don’t make my *good* women ready to fall in love with two men at once.

William Thackeray – Letter to Mrs Carmichael Smyth

All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought, – love. It begins with the child of six years old, at the opening, – a charming picture, – and it closes with it at the last page; and so dominant is this idea – so incessant is the writer’s tendency to describe the need of being loved, that the heroine, who tells her own story, leaves the reader at last under the uncomfortable impression of her having either entertained a double love, or allowed one to supersede another without notification of the transition.

Harriet Martineau – Review of *Villette*

What passion, what fire in her! Quite as much as in George Sand, only the clothing is less voluptuous.

George Eliot on reading *Villette*

Women’s autobiography is thus – at least potentially – a canny, duplicitous exercise, less an act of unveiling than the calculated assumption of a costume.

Molly Hite – “‘Except thou ravish mee’: Penetration into the life of the (feminine) mind”

While in fact it is really a question of another economy which diverts the linearity of the project, undermines the target-object of a desire, explodes the polarisation of desire on only one pleasure, and disconcerts fidelity to only one discourse.

Luce Irigaray – “This sex which is not one”

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The outraged responses to *Villette* by two writers Brontë greatly admired, William Thackeray and Harriet Martineau, both focus on the transgressive nature of Lucy’s “double love” and her *public* expression of the “need of being loved” (Martineau quoted in Gaskell 1985: 618 – 9). This expression of desire is so intense that it disturbs Martineau with its “assumption that events and characters are to be regarded through the medium of one passion only” (619), seeing in Lucy precisely the “monomaniac tendency” Lucy sees in Polly Home’s love for her father (Brontë 1987b: 67). Thackeray, similarly disconcerted by Lucy’s “burning desire” (quoted in Gérin 1969: 523), patronises both character and author, whom he conflates, because it is clearly impossible for him to read the reciprocation of that desire in the novel. In an attempt to reinstate the

convention that Brontë's representation of female desire disrupts with impunity, he, in a letter, describes Brontë as "a poor little woman of genius! The fiery little eager brave tremulous home-faced creature!" (523), who is to be pitied because it is the "girls with pretty faces . . . [who] will get dozens of young fellows fluttering about" them and not "a little bit of a creature without a penny worth of good looks" (522), like Brontë. Thackeray's reading of Lucy's desire as "the author's naive confession of being in love with 2 (sic) men at the same time" (522), interestingly repeats Dr John/Graham Bretton's judgment of the actress, Vashti in *Villette*: "he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment" (Brontë 1987b: 342).¹

In contrast to the judgments by Martineau and Thackeray, George Eliot's response to *Villette*, a novel "which [she], at least, would rather read for the third time than most new novels for the first" (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 408) celebrates the "passion" and "fire" (quoted in Gordon 1994: 255). She also situates the novel within the broader European context by aligning Brontë with George Sand, yet another woman writer whose use of a male pseudonym (and male clothing) freed her to speak the public discourse of literature.² Eliot's shrewd comparison foregrounds the sensuality of both the narrative and the narrator, and draws attention to the significance of clothing as costume or disguise in a novel that is obsessed with surveillance and secrecy. Sandra Gilbert, for instance, points out that Brontë anticipates

female modernists like Woolf, together with their post-modernist heirs [who] imagine costumes of the mind with much greater irony and ambiguity, in part because women's clothing is more closely connected with the pressures and oppressions of gender and in part because women have far more to gain from the identification of costume with self or gender. Because clothing powerfully defines sex roles, both overt and covert fantasies of transvestitism are often associated with the intensified clothes consciousness expressed by these writers. (1982: 195)

Even if the clothing in *Villette* is not "as voluptuous" as it is in Sand's novels, the mere use of the word "voluptuous" in relation to a Brontë novel signifies an exact identification of the novel's preoccupation with female desire and passion.

which challenges the conventional objectification of women's sexuality.

Brontë's reclamation of women's bodies as sites of feeling, whether of pleasure or pain, coincides with a refusal to submit to the tyranny of a socially constructed notion of what is beautiful and therefore seen to be capable of both feeling love and desire, and eliciting a reciprocating passion.

Brontë must frequently have encountered the pervasive belief that only conventional beauty can (and should) inspire love, and that it is somehow indecent for unbeautiful women to feel love and desire. Thackeray's response to Brontë's physical appearance, quoted above, is but one example of how this notion of beauty affected her life and relationships. Her publisher, George Smith, responded similarly to her appearance when he wrote:

She had fine eyes, but her face was marred by the shape of her mouth and by the complexion. There was but little feminine charm about her; and of this fact she was herself uneasily and perpetually conscious . . . I believe she would have given all her genius and all her fame to have been beautiful. Perhaps few women ever existed more anxious to be pretty than she, or more angrily conscious of the circumstances that she was not pretty. (Quoted in Gérin 1969: 364-5)

In her biography of Brontë, Lyndall Gordon notes how this attitude affected Brontë, whose "awareness of physical flaws – and pity from men like Smith and Thackeray – made her wince in public" (1995: 279). When Brontë visited Elizabeth Gaskell in 1853, she confided that she experienced her physical appearance as "something almost repulsive", and related it to "her fear of loving as much as she could because 'she had never been able to inspire the kind of love she felt'" (279). The belief that she was "conspicuously ugly" manifested itself in the conviction that "once strangers looked at her, they would avoid looking in her direction again" (280).

Gaskell's recollections seem to support Smith and Thackeray's interpretation of Brontë's self-consciousness. However, this reading would, I think, disregard the very specific patriarchal aesthetic from within which the two men look at Brontë, as it also disregards her own awareness of the way in which this gaze fixes her as lacking and inadequate, even grotesque. This

perception may well be aggravated by Brontë's internalisation of nineteenth-century views of women intellectuals as monstrous. As Sidonie Smith, for instance, argues:

Effectively, the woman who would reason like universal man becomes unwomanly, a kind of monstrous creature or *lusus naturae*. Thus nineteenth-century representations of the intellectual woman oftentimes turn on the disalignment of her bodily parts, as if to suggest that the very exercise of the intellect pulls natural phenomena into grotesque postures. (1993: 15)

The male gaze causes self-consciousness because it forces Brontë to look at herself in the same way that she is looked at by men. She thus assumes the position John Berger theorises in *Ways of Seeing* when he suggests that "[t]he surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (quoted in Smith 1993: 83). The gendered language George Smith uses when describing Brontë's lack of "feminine charm" (quoted in Gérin 1968: 364) coincides with a weighing up of "genius" and "fame" against "beauty", suggesting that for Brontë the lack of "beauty" outweighs her creativity and achievements as a woman writer. According to Smith, Brontë is angry because she is not beautiful. It does not occur to him, as it also does not occur to Thackeray, that she is angry because patriarchal society, and the male writers within that society, make beauty the prerequisite of love for women, whilst, at the same time, making great passions and intensity of desire the prerogative of men, and the male heroes of their novels.

In the process, women are constructed as beautiful objects of (male) desire who have no desire of their own except to be desired by men. Beauty, the signifier of value in the patriarchal matrimonial economy, ensures woman's desirability, but also, paradoxically, her enclosure in marriage, and the silencing and containment of *her* desire and sexuality. If marriage is seen as a woman's only access to being loved and loving, and if marriage is predicated on the woman's beauty, then many women are excluded from this idyll. This is, of course, not only because these women are not beautiful, but also because there were many "redundant women" at the time Brontë was writing. The 1851

Census, for instance, records a surplus of half a million females over males in Britain, and that “42 percent of the women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried” (Poovey 1988: 4).

Brontë's anger should be read within this context, because she both suffers under the gaze that diminishes her achievements and subjectivity, and rejects its right to construct, and silence, her desire. George Smith's view that she lacks “feminine charm” (quoted in Gérin 1968: 364) implicitly participates in the censure of the unmarried woman writer's transgression into the public, and therefore male, domain of publishing. Brontë's sensitivity to the inevitable stigmatisation risked by the woman writer is expressed in a letter to G. H. Lewes, when she writes: “I wish you did not think me a woman”:

I wish all reviewers believed ‘Currer Bell’ to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me . . . Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity. (Quoted in Gaskell 1975: 386)

For a woman writer who lacks beauty, which is seen as the mark of true femininity, the transgression of traditional gender roles also makes her vulnerable to accusations of masculine behaviour. Public writing could be seen to represent a symbolic transvestitism, and female transvestites were, as Lillian Faderman suggests, perceived as a threat by patriarchy because “[t]hey impersonated men. They claimed for themselves a variety of privileges ordinarily reserved for men – self-sufficiency, freedom to wander unmolested, freedom to explore occupations more varied than those open to women” (1985: 52). The woman writer who is not married represents a similar threat and her sexuality, because it is perceived to circulate freely outside the boundaries of marriage, is cause for the same anxiety associated with the female transvestite. The inscription of sexuality as *either* masculine *or* feminine is evident in attitudes towards both female transvestites and (unmarried) female writers. The ‘mannish’ appearance of the female transvestite is automatically associated with lesbianism, whereas the woman writer's sexuality cannot be as

easily defined, even though her unmarried status signals, at least, potential lesbianism. Yet it is not lesbian sex in itself that causes anxiety, but rather, as Faderman argues, “the attempted usurpation of male prerogatives by women who behaved like men that many societies appeared to find most disturbing” (17). As long as a woman “appeared feminine” and “dressed in clothes suitable to her sex, it might be assumed that she was not sexually aggressive”, and her participation in a lesbian relationship a mere “apprenticeship” to heterosexuality (17). Similarly, if the woman writer is married (like Elizabeth Gaskell, for instance), or subscribes to conventional feminine roles for women, she can more easily be accommodated within the ideological framework of patriarchy, her writing always in its service.

An interesting example of how transgression was accommodated by Victorian literary society is evident in its valorisation of George Eliot. Although Eliot openly thwarted convention by living with George Henry Lewes, many literary men, including George Smith, for instance, visited her but did not take their wives and daughters along on these visits. Eliot’s unmarried status, lack of beauty, and choice of a male pseudonym would seem to make her vulnerable to the same treatment by literary men that Brontë experienced. Yet this is not so. Although Eliot’s physical appearance is mentioned in discussions of her life and work, she does not generate the type of anxiety associated with Brontë.³ Two factors appear to work in her favour. Unlike Brontë, whose *single* status and passionate nature hint at uncontained desire circulating freely, Eliot’s relationship with Lewes, though adulterous, is seen to provide a focus for her desire in one man, duplicating the containment of female sexuality within marriage and inscribing heterosexuality. In addition, Eliot’s novels conform to notions of feminine behaviour because she “denied her female characters the success she herself had achieved, teaching the moral values of patience, renunciation, and self-sacrifice in the interest of the higher social good of the family, the community, and the law of the father” (Erkkila 1992: 81).

Brontë, on the other hand, represents a challenge to the silencing of female desire. Not only is she herself so obviously desiring (the response of both Thackeray and Smith attests to the anxiety this passion induces in men), she also creates desiring female characters who resist the patriarchal

insistence that the language of desire belongs solely to men. Brontë's novels therefore attempt to create a discourse of desire that facilitates the articulation of female desire, which is expelled from the Victorian novel as transgressive when it fails to conform to normative conventions. The two fictional autobiographies represent the two different stages of this project. *Shirley* can thus be read as the moment of transition between *Jane Eyre*, an attempt to negotiate a space for the articulation of female desire within the conventional structure of the nineteenth-century novel, and *Villette*, an attempt to undermine that structure altogether because it is shown to be both an inadequate and an inappropriate form for the representation of female desire. One could argue that, in *Villette*, Brontë's growing confidence in her identity as a woman writer allows her to construct a female first-person narrator who speaks, as she herself does, from outside the confines of marriage. Whereas Jane Eyre speaks from the position of legitimated desire, desire made domestic by marriage and motherhood, Lucy Snowe writes at the end of a life lived in opposition to marital domesticity, her desire unconfined and undefined by the patriarchal model of female existence as relational. Jane's autobiography represents a recuperation of her identity prior to marriage, yet relies on the safety of conventional roles that her marriage affords her. If her desire for Rochester was originally transgressive, it becomes, after marriage, conventionalised. Jane thus represents, at least to a significant degree,

the extent that woman represses the body, erasing her sexual desire and individual identity while embracing encumbering identities in service to family, community, and country [because] she positions herself as a proper lady who surmounts her negative identification with the body through selflessness.
(Smith 1993: 16)

In contrast, *Villette* resists this erasure of desire and inscribes Lucy Snowe's body into the text to the extent that body and text become inseparable. Speaking from *outside* the containing structures of marriage, Lucy Snowe articulates her desire that, by its very existence, challenges notions of female sexuality because it refuses to conform to the compulsory heterosexuality that informs the realist plot. Her narrative defies definitions of sexual desire as

singular and stable, and instead signals lesbian desire as an aspect of the fluidity of desire.

The story of Queen Victoria's disbelief in the existence of lesbianism is often repeated to illustrate Victorian sexual ignorance or naiveté. According to the story, which has, as Terry Castle suggests, achieved "the status of cultural myth" (1997: 548n), Queen Victoria,

when asked by her ministers in 1885 whether the recently legislated Criminal Law Amendment Act outlawing homosexual acts between men should be made to apply to women as well, . . . is supposed to have expressed disbelief that such acts between women were physically possible. (1997: 532)

Castle calls the erasure of lesbianism that both the story and its retelling performs, the "Queen Victoria Principle" (532):

Desire between men was conceivable, indeed could be pictured vividly enough to require policing. Desire between women was not. The love of woman for woman, along with whatever 'indecent' it might entail, simply could not be represented. According to this primal (il)logic, it would follow therefore, that lesbian fiction is also inconceivable: a non-concept, a nothingness, a gap in the meaning of things – anything but a story there to be read. (533)

If desire between men has been perceived as the love that dares not speak its name, it is nonetheless structurally inscribed in patriarchal literature because, as Eve Sedgwick argues, "the European canon as it exists is already [a male-homosocial literary canon], and most so when it is most heterosexual" (1985: 17). Desire between women is, on the other hand, the love without a name and without a language, at least within the dominant discourse of nineteenth-century literature. The disruptive desire in *Villette* is consistently read as a heterosexual "double love", and is rejected by critics like Thackeray and Martineau because it contradicts the perception of female sexuality as singular, and not multiple, as Lucy's desire clearly is. The possibility that this "double love", which positions Lucy in the traditional erotic triangle figuring two men and a woman, is only one aspect of Lucy's desire, is never considered, because the lesbian alternative is

unthinkable. It is, as Terry Castle suggests, representative of the “primal (il)logic” that there is “anything but a story there to be read” (1997: 532).

Lucy’s avid participation in triangular relationships that involve two women and a man may be read as a story trying to tell itself despite the strictures of convention. The triangular configurations that situate a man between two women constitute an inversion of the male homosocial triangle and, “at least hypothetically, destabilises the ‘canonical’ triangular arrangement of male desire, is an affront to it, and ultimately – in the radical form of lesbian bonding – displaces it entirely” (Castle 1997: 536). The obsessive triangulation of relationships that define Lucy Snowe’s autobiographical narrative represents a revision of the structures of desire in Brontë’s first novel, *The Professor*, discussed in the Introduction. *The Professor* proceeds from a self-conscious mimicry of convention by explicitly articulating the relationship between the authority of the male narrated/authored text and the triangular configuration of male homosocial desire. In *Villette*, the expression of desire from a female narrative perspective privileges instead the fluidity of desire as it circulates within and amongst the triangular relationships that the narrative sets up.

Laying claim to a discourse of desire that challenges the taboos around issues of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is, of course, dangerous. Lucy’s narrative therefore shows the need for a self-conscious assumption of disguise as a strategic form of self-defense in a society that distorts female sexuality. Jeremy Tambling, for instance, argues that

[t]he characterisation of women as having most to hide, and as constructed by guilt, sexual misplacing and by illness and hysteria belongs to that nineteenth-century discourse of sexuality Foucault describes as inducing ‘a hysterisation of women’s bodies’, where the feminine body is seen to be ‘thoroughly saturated with sexuality’. (1990: 149)

When Brontë therefore writes in a letter that Lucy Snowe “has about her an *external* coldness” (quoted in Gaskell 1985: 485, emphasis added), she hints at the discrepancy between the interior and exterior lives of women that *Villette* interrogates. In the same letter, Brontë, disclaiming an understanding of

the “subtlety of thought [that] made [her] decide upon giving [Lucy] a cold name”, nonetheless insists that “[a] *cold* name she must have” (485). Her choice of Snowe, rather than “Frost”, a name she had considered but rejected, comments on exactly those de/prescriptions of female sexuality that Lucy’s narrative explodes.

The discrepancy between an *external* appearance of coldness and a passionate *internal* nature in direct contrast to that appearance, is what Lucy negotiates in her autobiography. Introducing herself to her reader, she at first asserts an inner self that mirrors the coldness of her name and appearance, particularly distancing herself from the intensity of emotion Polly Home represents. Lucy tells her reader that, unlike Polly, she has a “cooler temperament” and an ability for “cool observation” (70). She defines her autobiographical self according to the same standards: “I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination” (69); and “I, Lucy Snowe, was calm” (79). Lucy’s representation of herself as unimaginative and rational results from a perhaps similar understanding of nineteenth-century views on women, as expressed by George Eliot:

Women have not to prove that they can be emotional, and rhapsodic, and spiritualistic; every one believes that already. They have to prove that they are capable of accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command. (Quoted in Smith 1993: 15)

This need for “continuous self-command” (15) also derives from the recognition that the self is unacceptable or abnormal, which, for the woman writer, must coincide with a knowledge of the way in which nineteenth-century society perceives female sexuality as always compromised and compromising. Since “the identification of female selfhood with the body is nowhere more dramatic than in the fear of woman that saturates nineteenth-century culture” (Smith 1993: 16), Lucy’s experience of her body as utterly at odds with the norms of beauty, and yet stubbornly unruly and desiring, further exaggerates this risk. Her body must therefore be constantly controlled, or it must, at least, seem to the reader as if she makes an attempt at self-discipline.

When Lucy therefore confides how “certain accidents of the weather, were almost dreaded by [her], because they woke the being [she] was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry [she] could not satisfy” (Brontë 1987b: 176), she explicitly contradicts the earlier representation of herself as calm and dispassionate. Her expression of the severe psychological pain she experiences as a result of her continuous self-control takes the narrative beyond the silencing structures of the nineteenth-century novel.⁴ Whereas Jane Eyre’s dreams represent the containment of anxiety in smaller narratives that destabilise the narrative proper, Lucy’s entire autobiography may be read as the narrator’s attempt to write (and right) the effects of repression on women in the Victorian novel. Sally Shuttleworth argues that “Lucy’s intricate dramatisations of her feelings undermine traditional divisions between external social process and inner mental life” (1992: 158). In *Villette*, therefore, the representation of “socially inflicted repression” (159)

calls into question the doctrine of control, thus implicitly challenging the economic model of healthy regulation which underpinned mid-Victorian theories of social, psychological, and physiological functioning. The mind, like the body, or the social economy, was to be treated as a system to be guided, regulated, and controlled. (152)

For Lucy, repression is an act of extreme violence against the self, as is evident from her description of the effects of “a thunderstorm” on her (Brontë 1987b: 176). In contrast to the Catholic students, who “rose in panic and prayed to their saints”, coming together in “the dormitory [where] they gathered round the night-lamp in consternation, praying loud”, Lucy seeks a solitary communion with the violence of “the tempest [that] took hold of [her] with tyranny” (176):

I was roughly roused and obliged to live. I got up and dressed myself, and creeping outside the casement close by my bed, sat on its ledge, with my feet on the roof of a lower adjoining building. It was wet, it was wild, it was pitch dark . . . I could not go in: too restless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never

delivered to man – too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts. (176)

Unable to vent the intense passion she feels because there is no room, and perhaps not even a language, for the expression of such powerful feelings in the social and literary constructs of a society that silences women, Lucy must let Nature speak for her. However, since this experience awakens desire, it also demands extreme measures for its control:

I did long, achingly, then and for four-and twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards. This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core. (176)

The violent control of feelings that remain “rebellious”, and the suffering it causes, is constantly articulated, theorised, and displayed in Lucy’s narrative. When she, for instance, returns to Madame Beck’s school after her stay with the Brettons, Dr John’s promise to write to her leads to a vivid portrayal of the conflict between her own desire, constructed as “Imagination”, and the strictures that “Reason” imposes (306 – 309).

Both these figures are constructed as female, even maternal. “Reason” is described as a “hag” (307), “vindictive as a devil”, “envenomed as a stepmother” whose vicious treatment instills “the obedience of fear” and who represents extreme deprivation: “her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows” (308). In contrast, “Imagination” is represented as Reason’s “soft, bright foe”, a “kinder Power who holds [Lucy’s] secret and sworn allegiance” (308). Lucy’s description of this “good angel” who appears “in the sky a head amidst circling stars” (308), recalls similar metaphors of motherhood as a metaphysical revelation associated with the natural world in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. Here, too, the good mother is one who feeds and nurtures the suffering, outcast daughter: “My hunger has this good

angel appeased with food, sweet and strange" (308). In the same way that the other motherless daughters in Brontë's novels attempt to formulate an alternative for female religious expression, Lucy constructs "Imagination" as a female deity whose domain, unlike that of the paternal God whose domain is traditionally described as a mansion with many rooms, is limitless and not represented in terms of man-made structures:

Divine, compassionate, succourable influence! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain. Temples have been reared to the Sun – altars dedicated to the Moon. Oh, greater glory! To thee neither hands build, nor lips consecrate; but hearts, through ages, are faithful to thy worship. A dwelling thou hast, too wide for walls, too high for dome – a temple whose floors are space – rites whose mysteries transpire in presence, to the kindling, the harmony of worlds! (308)

Lucy's utopian vision of "Imagination" as a good, nurturing mother-deity whom she secretly worships coincides with the first real construction of her identity as a writer. In contrast to the imperative to speak that defines Jane Eyre's autobiographical identity, Lucy is a poor speaker, but a good writer. As "Reason" points out, speaking to Dr John poses no danger: "Talk for you is good discipline. You converse imperfectly. While you speak, there can be no oblivion of inferiority – no encouragement to delusion: pain, privation, penury stamp your language" (307). The debate into which she enters with Reason results from her desire to write to Dr John in response to his letters. Lucy clearly anticipates with pleasure the chance to write to him because she feels secure about her ability to express herself in writing, hence Reason's quick warning that she is a "fool" to "meditate pleasure in replying" (307). Her desire to "express" (307) her feelings in letters, rather than in spoken words, is thwarted by Reason. The desperation in her question: "But if I feel, may I *never* express?" (307), is a poignant example of how the desire for self-expression coincides with a severe reserve enforced by her perception of her physical presence as inhibiting. For Lucy, "the bodily presence is weak and the speech contemptible", whereas "written language [is] the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve" (307).

Although Lucy frequently comments on her inability to speak, there are, however, two incidents in her narrative when her anxiety about speaking is reconfigured within the context of performance. The first is when M. Paul insists that she perform in the school play, and the second, when Madame Beck asks her, or challenges her, to take the place of the absent English teacher. The relationship between theatrical performance and teaching is signalled by Lucy's participation in these two kinds of public performance. This furthermore foregrounds the constructions of gender that her performance interrogates, because she plays the "man's part", both in the play and when she becomes the directress of her own school, usurping the traditionally male role of her fictional predecessor, "The Professor".

When she is compelled to perform in M. Paul's play, she tells her reader that "[i]t was not the crowd I feared, so much as my own voice" (209). It is obvious that Lucy enjoys performing and she admits "[a] keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of [her] nature" (211). She is, however, also conscious of the risk this entails because performance may lead to the inadvertent revelation of her hidden, emotional self. Again, the hidden or repressed self is associated with pleasure, which needs to be controlled because nineteenth-century society associates any expression of female pleasure with a rampant and dangerous sexuality. Lucy therefore pushes aside "this new-found faculty [that] might gift [her] with a world of delight" and "fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked" (211). The autobiographical identity Lucy thus constructs for herself is, in contrast, that of "a mere looker-on at life" (211). When M. Paul, for instance, invites Lucy to dance after the play, she escapes from him because she fears that she may be "compelled . . . to this second performance" (211). Instead, she chooses to observe rather than act.

But I had acted enough for one evening; it was time I retired into myself and my ordinary life Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe – the ball, its splendours and its pleasures passed before me as a spectacle. (211)

Even though she avoids a “second performance” (211), the effects of the first carries over into her exchange with Dr John in the garden of the school where she is “startled” because she “speak[s] in an unpremeditated, impulsive strain” (222). Her teasing, flirtatious tone – a residue from the play – suggests a self-confidence contradicting the representation of herself as one whose speech is marred by self-consciousness. However, the dangers of self-expression, once indulged, are made apparent here because Lucy describes her conversation with Dr John as “the second time that night I was going beyond myself” (222).

Sally Shuttleworth suggests that in *Villette* identity is “not a given, but rather a tenuous process of negotiation between the subject and surrounding social forces” (1992: 159). The tension between an inner, passionate self that craves expression, and which is obviously at odds with a society that condemns such intensity in a woman, and an outer self that conforms to the strictures of that society is, as I have suggested, at the heart of Lucy’s narrative. When Lucy tells her reader about the discovery of this ability to act, and the “delight” (Brontë 1987b: 211) it promises, she inscribes, as she does throughout her narrative, a critique of the society that condemns her to deny or repress aspects of herself. The inclusion of, and frequent references to, this *other* self keeps the reader constantly aware of the irony that female existence is always, in some way or another, premised on an intricate performance of femininity, or what Luce Irigaray calls the “masquerade of femininity” (1991: 136). Referring to Freud’s female Oedipus complex, Irigaray describes it as “woman’s entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can ‘appear’ and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men” (136).

In *Villette*, Ginevra’s assumption of a vivacious and sparkling role whenever men are present, only to become “flat and listless” (399) in their absence, epitomises another version of the performance of femininity. When Lucy, for instance, retreats from the ball, she watches and describes Ginevra’s enjoyment of the dance, which “made her flash like a gem, and flush like a flower” (211). It is, however, Ginevra’s spirited piano playing at a party that illustrates, amusingly, the absurdity of this type of performance. In the absence

of the male guests, she “denounced both the ‘discours’ and the dinner as stupid affairs”, but “[t]he moment the gentlemen were heard to move, her railings ceased: she started up, flew to the piano, and dashed at it with spirit” (399). Ginevra is representative of young girls from “well-descended” but “poor” (116) families who accept, and are shaped by, the roles available to them. Although Lucy’s class position is not that different from Ginevra’s, the need to “earn a living” distinguishes her from Ginevra, who learns from her parents that her beauty should be “manage[d]” (116) to secure her a wealthy husband. In the relationship between the two women, she serves as a foil to Lucy, who rejects the assumptions underlying her “obstinate credulity, or incredulity, her incapacity to conceive how any person not bolstered up by birth or wealth, could maintain an attitude of reasonable integrity” (394). Lucy’s narrative sets out to prove how “reasonable integrity” is indeed maintained regardless of “birth or wealth” (394), but it does so in a manner that interrogates traditional assumptions about identity.

When Lucy describes herself as “a rising character” in response to Ginevra’s persistent questions, the trajectory of the rise she traces from “an old lady’s companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher” (394), appears to conform to the notion of progressive achievement which typifies nineteenth-century autobiography. However, Lucy’s irony undercuts this description of herself. The self-consciousness that informs her narrative inscribes a multiplicity of selves and challenges the belief in the stability of identity that others try to impose on her. These impositions of identity often take the form of a *reading* of her character that is shown, with some delight, by Lucy to be either a misreading or, more frequently, an incomplete reading.

Ginevra, for instance, often attempts readings of Lucy’s character, which she finds “peculiar and mysterious” (394). The central question for her is always whether Lucy is a “nobody” (393) or an “anybody” (394), and she relates it explicitly to origin when she says, “I suppose you are nobody’s daughter” (213). It is not surprising that Lucy’s association with the Brettons and the de Bassompierres triggers Ginevra’s “undisguised and unsophisticated curiosity” (393) about Lucy’s identity. Ginevra’s attempt to make sense of Lucy’s social position relies on an understanding of her own position as a woman within a

particular social class structure which depends on her relation to either a father or a husband. This clear-headed understanding of what is required of her is already apparent when Lucy first meets her on the ship from London to Labassecour. Ginevra tells Lucy, whom she pities because she has to “earn a living”, that she has “five sisters” and “[b]y and by we are all to marry – rather elderly gentlemen, I suppose, with cash: papa and mama manage that” (116). Ginevra’s one sister, Augusta, had in fact married just such a “rich” man who, though he is “much older-looking” than her father, supplies her with “carriage and establishment” (116). This arrangement is, according to Ginevra, much better than “earning a living” (116).

Ginevra’s delineation of her situation is interestingly anticipated by Lucy’s detailed observation of the Watsons, fellow passengers on the ship who are “doubtless rich people” (113). She expresses profound “amazement” when she discovers that “the oldest, plainest, greasiest, broadest” one of the men, both of whom are “of low stature, plain, fat and vulgar”, is indeed the “bridegroom” of the “very young . . . beautiful girl” (113). Yet, what shocks Lucy even more is the girl’s behaviour, because “instead of being desperately wretched in such a union, she was gay even to giddiness” (113). However, her assumption that the girl’s laughter results from “a frenzy of despair” (113) is undercut by the humour with which she represents the situation, and her own response to it. The girl’s friendly offer of a camp stool is, for instance, described as being accompanied by “a smile of which the levity puzzled and startled [Lucy], though it showed a perfect set of perfect teeth” (113). Lucy describes her own puzzlement at the girl’s choice of this husband, “who was at least as much like an oil-barrel as a man” (113), in a similar tone of amusement, directed both at herself, the girl and, of course, the man. The satiric humour, which shows itself only tentatively here, emerges more frequently and more explicitly as Lucy’s narrative progresses. It is, as Regina Barreca suggests in relation to both Lucy Snowe and *Jane Eyre*, “a combination of self-defense and mutiny, [used] as a way of negotiating with a world they often dislike and always distrust” (1994: 61). Lucy also mocks her own tendency to dramatise a situation as tragic when it may not necessarily cause misery and despair in

reality, as Ginevra's explanation of her own situation, and her eventual marriage to de Hamal, shows.

The notion of gender as performance is introduced into Lucy's narrative in a way that both articulates the ideological imperative and foregrounds the subversive potential of such performance for women when it becomes self-conscious. Lucy's relationship with Ginevra provides a space within the narrative where the construction of sexual identity is most consistently interrogated. Both characters, because they are conscious of the way in which society dictates their respective performances, escape through a knowing assumption of disguise. Lucy, therefore, finds Ginevra's "directness" to be her "best point" (394) and is amused by her desire to discover Lucy's *real* identity because, although it acknowledges the existence of a disguise, it still participates in the belief that there is a hidden, fixed identity to be found. Lucy's response that she is "[p]erhaps a personage in disguise" (393), illustrates her self-consciousness as a narrator, because she plays with Ginevra's "notion of an incognito" (394), which is obviously derived from popular fiction. The playfulness that is always present in the interchange between the two women disguises an implicit criticism of the representation of women as mysterious and duplicitous.

Ginevra's liaison and elopement with de Hamal appears to confirm this view of female sexuality as transgressive and deceitful. However, even though Ginevra also deceives Lucy, the narrative seems to condone her deception because Lucy, instead of condemning her, mocks the reader's expectation that such behaviour deserves great suffering when she writes that

[i]n winding up Mistress Fanshawe's memoirs, the reader will no doubt expect to hear that she came finally to bitter expiation of her youthful levities. Of course, a large reserve of suffering lies in reserve for her future. (Brontë 1987b: 575)

Ginevra, as Lucy makes plain two pages later, in fact "suffer[s] as little as any human being [she] ha[s] ever known" (577). Thus, the deception is not represented as a significant breach of confidence at all, but it rather serves as

yet another example of the way in which Lucy's narrative subverts narrative expectation and challenges both literary conventions and gender conventions.

De Hamal's significance in the relationship between Lucy and Ginevra is foreshadowed in Lucy's performance in the school play. Playing "an empty-headed fop" (203), she assumes the role of de Hamal in relation to Dr John when she notices that Ginevra is "acting at" (210) Dr John, who is in the audience, and "that she once or twice threw a certain marked fondness, and pointed partiality into her manner towards [Lucy] – the fop" (210). Lucy enters into the spirit of Ginevra's coquetry, "rivalled and out-rivalled" the "sincere lover" in whom she "saw Dr John", and "acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer" Ginevra (210). On the surface, this performance appears to simply re-enact the traditional erotic triangle that already exists, with Dr John and de Hamal as rivals for Ginevra's love. Yet it in fact subverts that triangle significantly, because it displaces de Hamal with Lucy, situating in its stead the triangle that figures Lucy and Ginevra with Dr John as the mediating male figure. This performance therefore presents an alternative paradigm for mediated desire that privileges the relationship between the two women, thus transforming the erotic triangle that Girard and Sedgwick propose as fundamental to the Western canon with one that displaces, or at least challenges, male homosocial desire with female homosocial desire.

By playing her part as if she were de Hamal, Lucy also draws attention to how similarly they are situated as transgressive figures in a rigidly gendered society that equates gender unproblematically with sexuality. The narrative consistently represents de Hamal as an effeminate dandy, and yet preferred by Ginevra as a lover and, eventually, a husband. Lucy describes him as "pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated – he was charming indeed" (216). When Lucy teases Ginevra about her preference for de Hamal, the underlying homo-eroticism that underlies apparent hetero-eroticism is signified by the smallness of de Hamal's hands, which would enable him to wear Ginevra's gloves: "I observed, too, with a deep rapture of approbation, that the colonel's hands were scarce larger than Miss Fanshawe's own, and suggested that this

circumstance might be convenient, as he could wear her gloves at a pinch” (217).

In Lucy's narrative, de Hamal serves as an illustration that gender is a costume, and not an intrinsic and fixed human characteristic to be equated with biological sex or with simplistic notions of what constitutes sexuality. Thus, although she describes him as effeminate, he is also a colonel in the army and therefore wears a military uniform that signifies masculinity in its most institutionalised form. At the same time, he uses a nun's habit, which is representative of an institution that controls female sexuality, to gain entrance into the girls' school (which is, in turn, closely associated with a convent) where he has a romantic tryst with Ginevra. In the process the myth of the nun who was buried alive for an undefined sexual transgression is used to his best advantage, because it in effect makes him invisible as a ghost. His successful penetration into the girls' school and the ease with which he manages the elopement with Ginevra contradict the moral of the nun's story that sexual transgression will be punished severely.

However, like Rochester's use of a gypsy woman's costume to gain the trust and discover the secrets of his female guests and of Jane Eyre, de Hamal's strategy also signals the potential danger of a predatory sexuality that Madame Beck is obviously guarding against. Does Lucy therefore condone or condemn de Hamal's use of disguise? I have suggested that Lucy does not appear to condemn Ginevra's deception and this attitude could therefore be seen to extend to de Hamal. Rather than expressing an explicit judgment, the narrative instead sets up situations to illustrate that rebellion against repression and control inevitably relies on deception and subterfuge.

An interesting contrast to de Hamal's manipulation of female costume emerges in the text when Mrs Bretton adorns the sleeping Graham with a sky-blue turban, “a lady's head-dress” (300), which *he* had won in the lottery at a concert they had attended with Lucy. Lucy, on the other hand, had won a “cigar-case” (300) and had refused to submit to Graham's “excessively anxious” (300) attempts to exchange the turban for the cigar-case. In a letter to Lucy, Mrs Bretton describes her dressing up of her sleeping son:

While he slept, I thought he looked very bonny, Lucy: fool as I am to be so proud of him: but who can help it? . . . Well, I took it into my head to play him a trick: so I brought out the sky-blue turban, and handling it and him with gingerly precaution, I managed to invest his brows with this grand adornment. I assure you it did not at all misbecome him; he looked quite Eastern, except that he is so fair . . . and when I put my large Cashmere about him, there was as fine a young bey, dey or pacha improvised as you would wish to see. (355)

In contrast to de Hamal's cross-dressing, which is represented as self-serving, Graham is adorned by his mother for her own visual pleasure. However, as she looks at her son, she longs for another woman with whom to look at and admire this picture: "I wish you had been with us the other evening" (355), she writes, because "[i]t was good entertainment; but only half-enjoyed, since I was alone: *you* should have been there" (356, emphasis in original). This seems to suggest that for a woman the pleasure of looking at a beautiful man, even her own son, is incomplete when not shared with another woman. In order to facilitate this shared looking, Mrs Bretton therefore describes the picture of the sleeping Graham to Lucy in a letter.

Her "trick" (355) of dressing him up in woman's clothing makes him both effeminate and Eastern, thus creating an exotic picture that plays with ambivalent sexuality. Graham's effeminacy co-exists with Victorian associations of sexual mastery and enslavement inscribed in the trope of eastern exoticism. However, unlike the descriptions of Rochester as a pacha in *Jane Eyre*, Mrs Bretton's description of her son firmly contradicts any real associations with the East when she writes that he cannot really be mistaken for a pacha because "he is so fair" (355). Whereas Rochester uses the metaphors of eastern exoticism to construct himself and his relationship with Jane – she is, for instance, stung by his "eastern allusion" (Brontë 1987a: 271) – Graham is asleep while being transformed by his mother into a picture that represents, in this novel, the ideal of masculine beauty as it is desired by women. This raises the question – one which, I would suggest, informs the whole novel – whether the female gaze, particularly the double female gaze, feminises the male object because it assumes the traditionally male position, or whether the male object becomes desirable only when the female gaze

recognises an effeminacy, whether latent or overt, that already exists. Is the woman who looks at and desires an effeminate man positioned as a homosexual man or as a lesbian or are both these sexual categories shown to be inadequate and irrelevant? *Villette* thus does not propose an ideal of androgyny, inasmuch as it appears to be fascinated by the notion of gender as a performance that relies on costume to give expression to itself and the resulting fluidity of sexual identity that is thus facilitated. The vagaries of desire that the novel traces are consistently related to the interplay between desire and the gaze as gendered and unstable, shifting as it dons both real and imaginary costumes.

This fascination with the fluidity of sexual identity anticipates Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, in which the shaping influence of costume is used, by "some philosophers" (1942: 108), to explain "certain changes" in the behaviour of "Orlando as a man" and "Orlando as a woman":

Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us . . . Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast; but they would mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. (108)

The argument presented by these philosophers is that "[h]ad they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same" (109). Orlando's biographer, however, argues that "[t]he difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity":

Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of woman's sex. And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual – openness indeed was the soul of her nature – something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. For here again, we come to a dilemma. Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the

very opposite of what it is above. Of the complications and confusions which thus result everyone has had experience; but here we leave the general question and note only the odd effect it had in the particular case of Orlando herself. (109)

In *Villette*, Lucy's refusal to wear men's clothing for her part in the play signifies a similar negotiation of gendered subjectivity. She writes that "[t]o be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man's name and part; as to his dress – *halte là!*" (Brontë 1987b: 208). This resistance stems partly from Zélie St Pierre's eagerness to dress her "like a man" (208). Lucy clearly dislikes Zélie because she describes her as "prodigal and profligate" (194), and she hints at some hidden, probably sexual, characteristic, which she finds distasteful:

A curious kind of reptile it seemed . . . [it] showed its snake-head to me but once, peering from the glimpse I got; its novelty whetted my curiosity: if it would have come out boldly, perhaps I might philosophically have stood my ground, and coolly surveyed the long thing from forked tongue to scaly tail-tip; but it merely rustled in the leaves of a bad novel; and, on encountering a hasty and ill-advised demonstration of wrath, recoiled and vanished, hissing. She hated me from that day. (194 – 5)

The vehemence with which Lucy rejects Zélie's attempt to dress her for the play could suggest that what Lucy saw "rustl[ing] in the leaves of a bad novel" (195) – most probably lent to her by Zélie – was lesbianism. To allow a lesbian to dress her "like a man" (208), may therefore position her in the man's part in relation to Zélie, who then assumes the woman's position. Lucy's insistence that she wants to dress herself – "Just let me dress myself" (208), she tells M. Paul – represents not necessarily a rejection of lesbianism *per se*, but the type of relationship "forced upon" (208) her by Zélie, whom she describes as "a cold, callous epicure" (195).

Instead of a wholesale assumption of male costume, Lucy, "once alone . . . [r]etained [her] woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment" and "assumed in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small

dimensions" (209). Having thus adapted herself for the role, she responds to Zélie's "cold, snaky" (209) sneer with a challenge to a duel, assuming an aggressive, masculine identity in relation to Zélie, who is constructed as feminine and thus an unequal opponent: "I was irritable, because excited, and I could not help turning upon her and saying, that if she were not a lady and I a gentleman, I should feel disposed to call her out" (209). Lucy's assumption of male clothing in addition to her female clothing does not prevent her from completely identifying with her role as "a gentleman" (209), and yet it also does not rely on an erasure of her female identity/clothing. Her strategy here signifies a deliberate destabilisation of gender and it thus performs a similar process of subversion that Judith Butler describes when she writes that "[t]he performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (1990: 137):

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalised by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatises the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (137 – 8, emphasis in original)

In thus "act[ing] to please [her]self" (Brontë 1987b: 211), Lucy maps the terrain of her desire as a stage upon which characters are continuously engaged in the shifting triangular configurations of mediated desire. The play allows her to position herself in a relationship with Ginevra that could potentially exclude men, but does so by inverting an already existing configuration that positions Ginevra in the mediating position between Dr John and de Hamal. She does so unwittingly because she is, at this stage, unaware that Ginevra's "Isadore" is Dr John. It is only after the play that Ginevra points out her rival lovers to Lucy. Dr John's earlier attempts to insert Lucy into a triangle with himself and Ginevra by inviting her to be "a guardian over a most innocent and excellent, but somewhat inexperienced being" are initially accepted by Lucy.

although she “felt no particular vocation to undertake the surveillance of ethereal creatures” and thinks, with some irony, that “this pearl of great price, this gem without flaw” (192) must be Madame Beck. Dr John, in fact, blushes because he senses that Lucy “was a little amused at him” (193). After the play, he again approaches Lucy who now knows that Ginevra, and not Madame Beck, is the one he expects her to “chaperon” (193), and describes what he thinks Lucy should feel for Ginevra:

You – every woman older than herself, must feel for such a simple, innocent, girlish fairy, a sort of motherly or elder-sisterly fondness. Graceful angel! Does not your heart yearn towards her when she pours into your ear her pure, child-like confidences? How you are privileged. (222)

Lucy’s performance in the play contradicts precisely the type of “motherly or elder-sisterly” (222) relationship Dr John envisages because Lucy does not assume the position of “a duenna” (192) but instead chooses the role of a rival for Ginevra’s affection. However, her indirect identification with de Hamal as it emerges in the play appears to be contradicted by her disapproval of Ginevra’s preference for him. As I have suggested above, her descriptions of de Hamal are all informed by a reading of his physical appearance as effeminate and she uses the appearance of masculinity as a marker of worth in her conversation with Ginevra where she asserts Dr John to be the more worthy suitor. Unlike de Hamal, Dr John is “most handsome and manly. *His features were not delicate, not slight like those of a woman*” (219, emphasis in original). This comparison is interestingly, and of course ironically, reversed when Lucy, responding to Dr John’s praises of Ginevra’s beauty, mimics his indirect comparison of Lucy and Ginevra mentioned above and instead praises what she condemns when talking to Ginevra. She thus plays on the rivalry between the two men and describes de Hamal as “a god-like person” (222), and suggests that “[y]ou, Dr John, and every man of a less refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne for the young, graceful Apollo” (222). Whereas Dr John is clearly stung by Lucy’s extravagant praise of de Hamal,

Ginevra is not swayed or impressed by Lucy's judgment because she refuses to become what Dr John wants her to be. She tells Lucy that she prefers de Hamal because he

is the most delightful company possible – a man quite in my way; not sensible and serious like the other, but one with whom I can talk on equal terms – who does not plague, and bore, and harass me with depths, and heights, and passions, and talents for which I have not taste. (219)

Long before the revelation of the true identity of "Isadore", Ginevra had in fact made it clear to Lucy why she is bored by him and, in so doing, had drawn an implicit parallel between Lucy and de Hamal who both accept her as she is, unlike the idealistic "Isadore" who sees only what he wants to see:

[T]he man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. Now, one can't help, in his presence, rather trying to justify his good opinion; and it does so tire one to be goody, and to talk sense, – for he really thinks I am sensible. I am far more at my ease with you, old lady – you, you dear crosspatch – who take me at my lowest, and know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character. (155)

Ginevra's affection for Lucy is consistently included in the narrative and Lucy makes a point of commenting on the physical expression of this affection, which she claims to find irritating but which tends to be often represented in amusing and sexually suggestive ways. One such incident is when Ginevra, on her way to "a large party" (152), shows off a newly acquired dress – a gift from "Isadore" as Lucy later learns – and "was going to bestow on [Lucy] a kiss, in her schoolgirl fashion of showing her delight" but Lucy "put her off at arm's length, to undergo cooler inspection" (152). On another occasion, Lucy does not want Ginevra to take her arm because "[w]hen she took my arm, she always leaned upon me her whole weight; and, as I was not a gentleman, or

her lover, I did not like it" (393). The relationship between the two women is also shown to survive beyond Ginevra's marriage and move abroad. In "winding up Miss Fanshawe's memoirs" (575), Lucy writes that she "thought [Ginevra] would forget [her] now, but she did not. For many years, she kept up a capricious, fitful sort of correspondence" (576) with Lucy.

Lucy's apparent need to hide or deny the intensity and importance of this friendship signals its subversive and transgressive potential. It may, at first, seem as if the narrative constructs the two women as rivals since Lucy is in love with Graham/Dr John who is in love with Ginevra who is in love with de Hamal. However, it does not in fact conform to this conventional representation of female relationships but instead interrogates the divisiveness of this paradigm, relating it specifically to male monopolisation of the gaze. I have earlier suggested, when discussing Mrs Bretton's letter to Lucy and her desire to share her pleasure in looking at Graham, that the narrative privileges the female gaze and appears to strengthen its subversive potential by inscribing it as a double gaze: two women looking together at a man. Lucy and Ginevra are frequently occupied in this shared looking, but they start by looking together at their own reflection in "a great looking-glass in the dressing-room" (214) after the play. Ginevra initiates this as a response to Lucy's refusal to praise her beauty – Lucy calls her "preposterously vain" (214) – and proceeds to compare their "positions" (215), telling Lucy that she has "no beauty" whereas she affirms her own beauty: "*I am pretty; you can't deny that*" (215, emphasis in original).

The exchange between the two women illustrates Ginevra's obsession with her own beauty as a weapon used to break men's hearts, and it makes Lucy's disapproval of what she ironically calls an "edifying amusement" (216) clear. Ginevra appraises herself and Lucy by applying the same standards of beauty and wealth or familial connection that a potential husband would. Lucy, in response, tells Ginevra that "sixpence I would not give to purchase you, body and soul" (216), thus drawing attention to the financial transactions that underlie the economy Ginevra's assumption of the male gaze perpetuates. Lucy's refusal to participate in these transactions coincides with Ginevra's evaluation of her position as "nobody's daughter" and hence outside the structures of trade within which "a daughter of a gentleman of family" (215) must operate. Instead

of the rivalry that results from the trade in women, Lucy and Ginevra use the mirror, symbol of the male gaze, to construct a relationship that defies the divisiveness of this gaze. Since this scene is preceded by their performance in a play about male rivalry and followed by their observations and discussions of de Hamal and Dr John, who are rivals for Ginevra's love, it seems to confirm female homosocial partnership as an opposing paradigm. The mirror, instead of dividing the two women, thus joins them in the act of looking and challenges the passivity inherent in the traditional positioning of women as objects to be looked at by men.

This scene also recalls Jane Eyre's paintings of Blanche Ingram and Rosamond Oliver and the purpose they serve in her negotiation of female homosociality in an economy that positions women as rivals. Reprimanding herself for what she sees as her own foolishness in believing that she could be Rochester's "favourite" (Brontë 1987a: 162), Jane sets herself the task of drawing a self-portrait "in chalk . . . without softening one defect: omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity: write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain'" (163). The contrasting picture she paints of "Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank" (163) is used to enforce "wholesome discipline" (164) and "self-control" and prepares her to "meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm" (164). Her painting of Blanche is based on Mrs Fairfax's description and is therefore "imaginary" (164) because she has not yet met Blanche. Yet, the two portraits represent for her the discrepancy in their social positions and their physical appearance, effectively working against any potential sense of rivalry she may feel because it is shown to be an exercise in futility. In contrast, Rosamond asks Jane to "sketch a portrait of her to show to papa" (373) and Jane uses this portrait to try to convince St John, who is passionately in love with Rosamond but "whom he thinks he ought not to marry" (375), to reconsider the rigidity of his self-denial. This, of course, fails. Instead, Jane's real identity is revealed because St John sees her name on the portrait, establishes that they are related and that she is "quite an heiress" (386). The portrait of "Miss Oliver, the heiress" (368) thus serves to establish Jane's new identity as also an heiress and facilitates her eventual escape from St John's controlling influence.

Whereas *Jane Eyre* represents the grasping of narrative voice as a means of *talking back* or speaking out, the privileging of the female gaze in *Villette* represents a subversive *looking back*. The transformation of scopic mastery results from the nature of Lucy's gaze, which is, I would argue, symbolised by her dual-gendered costume in the play. Throughout her narrative, Lucy not only looks at men with other women; she also looks at women with men who discuss their observations with her as if she were a man. Looking at and discussing Ginevra, for instance, Graham tells Lucy: "I believe if you had been a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl – my mother's god-son instead of her god-daughter – we should have been good friends: our opinions would have melted into each other" (Brontë 1987b: 401). Her gaze, however, consistently interrogates the way in which men look at women and she instead insists on looking differently.

Kate Millet's description of Lucy as "a pair of eyes, watching society; ridiculing, judging" (1992: 32) is extremely apt when one considers that Lucy's name in fact signals precisely this preoccupation with looking, because she is named for St Lucy (or Lucia), the patron saint of sight, who sacrificed her eyes and her life as a Christian martyr.⁵ Lucy, however, refuses to sacrifice vision, and asserts the importance of her eyes in conversation with Paulina when she says: "I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind" (Brontë 1987b: 520). It is of course significant that she here resists Paulina's continued praises of Graham's beauty and indirectly tells Paulina that the subject is painful to her:

I'll tell you what I do, Paulina . . . I *never see him*. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognised me, and then I shut my eyes; and if he were to cross their balls twelve times between each day's sunset and sunrise, except from memory, I should hardly know what shape had gone by. (520, emphasis in original)

Lucy's refusal to be blinded by Graham's beauty thus also represents her decision not to look at him with Paulina. Her withdrawal from this particular situation is a reversal of an earlier moment in the text when she remembers how, as a young girl in the Bretton's home, she "used to mount a music-stool for

the purpose of unhooking [a portrait of Graham], holding it in [her] hand, and searching into those bonny wells of eyes" (243) in an attempt to understand "[h]ow it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?" She also remembers how she then, "by way of test" (243) lifted Polly Home to look at the picture, finding in the child's response a confirmation of her own feelings.

Paulina's need to talk about Graham's beauty to Lucy may thus be seen as a repetition of the earlier event, and relies on what she remembers as an incident of shared looking that formed a bond of understanding and recognition between herself and Lucy. It also recalls Lucy's participation in the triangle she initiates with Graham and Polly, first as an observer of the growing bond between the little girl and the adolescent boy, and later, when Polly is about to return to her father, as an intermediary between the two. Her role as "confidante and mediator" (523) is even more pronounced later in the narrative when she has to listen to both Graham's and Paulina's declarations of love, one for the other, and relay their marriage plans to Paulina's resistant father.

Lucy's name must also be recognised as at least potentially evocative of Lucifer, the chief rebel angel who is a light-bringer, as his incarnation as the morning star suggests. One could argue that as an autobiographer, Lucy enacts what Gilbert and Gubar describes as the woman writer's identification with Lucifer:

Dispossessed by her older brothers – the 'Sons of God' – educated to submission, enjoined to silence, the woman writer, in fantasy if not in reality, must often have 'stalked apart in joyless revery', like Byron's heroes, like Satan, like Prometheus. Feeling keenly the discrepancy between the angel she was supposed to be and the angry demon she knew she often was, she must have experienced the same paradoxical double consciousness of guilt and greatness that afflicts both Satan and, say, Manfred. Composing herself to saintly stillness, brooding narcissistically like Eve over her own image and like Satan over her own power, she may even have feared occasionally that like Satan – or Byron's Lara, or his Manfred – she would betray her secret fury by 'gestures fierce' or a 'mad demeanour'. (1984: 203)

Lucy's observations at the art gallery illustrate how her way of looking represents an explicit challenge to a system of representation that positions women as decorative objects for male consumption or, alternatively, as "flat, dead, pale and formal" (277) stereotypes of virtuous womanhood clearly intended as lessons in good behaviour for women. She rejects the "Cleopatra", a painting which "seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection" (275) and which has "a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs", as "a very ugly picture" (277). M. Paul, who finds her in the gallery, is however shocked that she "dare[s] . . . to sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a *garçon*, and look at *that* picture" (277, emphasis in original). He directs her to a "set of four" (277) pictures in which "*La vie d'une femme*" is represented, typically showing woman in four stages that define her according to her married status. Lucy describes these women as "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers" (278).

Bored with her confinement to these "masterpieces" that she sees as neither aesthetically pleasing nor morally edifying, Lucy surveys the gallery to find that a "perfect crowd of spectators" had gathered around the "Cleopatra" and that "nearly half this crowd were ladies" (278). The significance of the painting as a sexual icon is made apparent when M. Paul explains that married or older women may look at the painting but not young or unmarried women. However, as Lucy points out, men, whether married or unmarried, are allowed to openly appraise the physical abundance of the near-naked female body. The display of this body is, in fact, invited and indulged because a comfortable seat is made available for this purpose. She notes that Paul "looked at the picture himself quite at his ease, and for a very long while" (278), and later, she also notices that both de Hamal and Graham are in the admiring crowd. Graham is, of course, exonerated because he is there looking for Lucy and expresses his preference for his mother and for Ginevra. Paul, like de Hamal, finds the painting superb and sees the "Cleopatra" as voluptuous, so much so that he wishes to prevent Lucy from looking at her, fearing its inflammatory influence. Lucy is however untouched by this representation of female sexuality as indolent, passive and almost grotesque in its utter physicality. She

notices the messiness of the picture, the “wretched untidiness surrounding her” (275), the chaos and disorder, and describes the picture as “an enormous piece of claptrap” (276).

The imagery of fire used by Paul to describe what he sees as the dangers of the sexually exciting picture of the “Cleopatra” anticipates the actual fire in the theatre on the night when Lucy and Graham watch Vashti’s performance. In her description of the performance, Lucy explicitly compares the Cleopatra and Vashti, calling “Paul Peter Rubens [to] wake from the dead” and to “bring into this presence all the army of his fat women” (340). Unlike the Cleopatra which is, as Kate Millet argues, “a masturbatory fantasy . . . the male dream of an open and panting odalisque” (1992: 36), Vashti emerges as a rebellious performer who, “like the biblical queen, refuses to be treated as an object, and consciously rejects art that dehumanises its subject or its audience” (Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 424). She is also implicitly contrasted with the four images of passive, compliant womanhood because Lucy, instead, describes her as a female Lucifer who resists containment within such rigidly prescribed roles:

To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn to shreds. . . . Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. . . . Her hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel’s hair, and glorious under a halo. Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled. (Brontë 1987b: 340)

It is quite obvious that as a rebel angel, Vashti represents the antithesis of that typically Victorian idealisation of female domesticity, defined and celebrated in Coventry Patmore’s poem, “The Angel in the House”. Virginia Woolf, in her lecture, “Professions for Women” (1931), describes her as follows:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of

her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her grace. In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel. (1995: 3)⁶

In opposition to the domestic ideal represented by this self-effacing angel, Vashti's performance enacts a transgression of the boundaries that demarcate public and private spheres as gendered spaces. Writing of Virginia Woolf's autobiographical "Sketch", Sidonie Smith describes this restriction of women to domestic spaces as "the socio/familial regulation of her very body" (1993: 92) and relates it to dress codes that serve a similar purpose of control because they define the female body as an object for decorative display:

For one, her body determines her assignment to certain household spaces since bourgeois gender ideologies spatialised the separate spheres through the physical division of the house into study and drawing room. Her body locates her in the drawing room. It also locates her in certain clothes . . . The dress becomes a costume of the body, a costume of the mind, enclosing the young woman literally and figuratively within a particular representation of female identity. (92)

In her study of women in the Edwardian theatre, Julie Holledge writes that the "early Victorian theatre was shunned by the bourgeoisie" because they saw it as "a place of decadent popular entertainment" (1981: 7) and actresses "were seen as scarlet women soliciting from the stage rather than the streets" (1981: 7): "In an age when the paragon of womanhood was the humble, obedient wife, mother or sister of some man, a woman who flagrantly displayed herself in the theatre was anathema" (7). However, because Vashti's performance challenges types of theatrical performance that are covertly sanctioned by society precisely because they represent women as decorative objects for male consumption, she defies the double standard that condemns the actress and exonerates the male onlooker.

Thus Dr John's smile, "a smile so critical, so almost callous" (Brontë 1987b: 342), signifies, as Lucy points out, the "branding judgement" of men who

cannot separate “woman” and “artist”. The male gaze cannot separate these categories because it can only see women as women, not as artists, a category reserved for men. Lucy’s identification with Vashti, on the other hand, signifies the contrasting position of the knowing female gaze that recognises and condones Vashti’s critique of female performance as solely for male visual pleasure. Her identification with the rebellious spirit of the actress is implicit in her description of Vashti as a female Lucifer and plays on the resonance of her own name with that of the fallen angel. Vashti’s performance as an embodiment of female pain, anger and rebellion could therefore be seen to represent a parallel to Lucy’s “heretic narrative” (235), which was also read as an indecent public display of female discontent and rebellion. Matthew Arnold, for instance, described *Villette* as a “hideous, undelightful, convulsed, constricted novel” and found in it evidence that Brontë’s “mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage” (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 337), a response similar to Dr John’s judgement of Vashti’s performance.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that “Vashti uses her art not to manipulate others, but to represent herself. Her art, in other words, is confessional, unfinished – not a product, but an act; not an object meant to contain or coerce, but a personal utterance” (424). When they describe it as “even a kind of strip show” (424), one is however reminded that, although the performance is one that challenges conventions, it nonetheless remains representative of the sensationalism associated with the public display of intense emotions by women. It is exactly the titillating nature of such “self-exposure” (424) suggested by Gilbert and Gubar’s use of the strip-tease metaphor that made Charcot’s displays of the female hysterics at the Salpêtrière so popular. Regardless of Charcot’s “professional scepticism and attempt to break the link between hysteria and the female sex” (Appignanesi and Forrester 1992: 66), it continued to be seen as “the perfect allegory of the feminine vices”. Because it was “[e]xcessive and uncontrollable, hysteria rendered public the hidden lusts, perverted religious passions and over-sensitiveness of the weaker sex” (66). Under hypnosis, female hysterics at the Salpêtrière were turned into performers for a specifically male audience who justified the pornographic nature of their interest by defining it as scientific research. Lisa Appignanesi writes that

[a]ll were made visible in the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, which, despite the neurological protestations of the master, was fanned by the evident erotic fascination of his young assistant doctors for the pathological types methodically displayed, arranged – by hypnosis – for the twenty minutes it took to take the photographs. (66)

Although Vashti's performance is not orchestrated by a 'master' hypnotist it resembles the acting out of extreme states of emotional pain which are, however, read by men as the expression of sexual excess. In *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830 – 1980*, Elaine Showalter argues that

despite their awareness of poverty, dependency, and illness as factors, the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control. (1985: 55)

Lucy's reading of Vashti's performance as an act of rebellion against the institutionalised repression of women's emotions therefore resembles feminist readings of hysteria as an expression of resistance against patriarchy and in so doing, constitutes a similar act of resistance. Although she rejects her own dramatic talent because she fears the risk of self-exposure, her description of Vashti's performance is not a judgement of it but an analysis of its efficacy. Even if the stage represents a public space that is in opposition to the private space of the home, seen as women's proper sphere, it nonetheless remains part of a system dominated by male scopophilic mastery and its construction of female sexuality. It is this construction of sexual identity that Lucy's performance in the school play resists because unlike Vashti's emotional strip show, Lucy puts on layers of clothing that signify a more complex rebellion. Cathartic though it may be, Vashti's performance is shown to be merely a little fire, easily doused, though causing a great deal of confusion. Unlike Bertha's fires in *Jane Eyre*, the fire in the theatre causes minimal damage: "Next

morning's papers explained that it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in a moment" (Brontë 1987b: 347).

Yet, for Lucy, this night is "marked in [her] book of life, not with white, but with a deep-red cross" (342) because, from this seemingly insignificant fire, little Polly Home, that epitome of the repressed domestic angel, is reborn as Paulina de Bassompierre. Lucy's relationship with Polly serves a similar purpose in her narrative as does Jane Eyre's relationship with Helen Burns. It is the friendship she ought to have, rather than the one she necessarily most enjoys having. It is suffused with a kind of sticky, Victorian sentimentality that is in sharp contrast with the delightful, irreverent, often caustic bantering that typifies the relationship between Lucy and Ginevra and which is, I would argue, far more representative of Lucy's true nature. One is thus more easily convinced of the sincerity of Lucy's refusal to be a "bright lady's shadow – not Miss Bassompierre's" (382) than one is by her apparently sincere declarations of affection:

I liked her. It is not a declaration I have often made concerning my acquaintance, in the course of this book; the reader will bear with it for once. Intimate intercourse, close inspection, disclosed in Paulina only what was delicate, intelligent, and sincere; therefore my regard for her lay deep. An admiration more superficial might have been more demonstrative: mine, however, was quiet. (461)

In the same way that Jane Eyre represents her friendship with the pleasure-loving Mary Ann Wilson as inferior to her more worthy relationship with the self-denying Helen Burns, Lucy's expressed preference for Paulina signals a more complex play of desire. Whereas the illicit pleasure Mary Ann represents in Jane's narrative is associated with Helen's death, and thus fraught with guilt and hence rejected, Ginevra's constant presence in Lucy's narrative signifies an attempt to inscribe transgressive desire into the plot of nineteenth-century domestic fiction of which Paulina is the heroine. The desire and pleasure that circulate among Lucy, Ginevra and Paulina appear to result from Graham Bretton/Dr John's attachment to all three women. However, he

serves merely as a mediating influence as Paulina and Ginevra turn to Lucy to confess their respective responses to him. In fact, Lucy's fluctuating opinion of Graham appears to reflect the contrasting responses of Ginevra, who ridicules him, and Paulina, who almost worships him. These responses also illustrate the degree to which the pairing of women successfully destabilises the paradigm of female rivalry inherent in the triangular configurations that privilege heterosexual desire.

When Lucy rejects M. de Bassompierre's lucrative offer to become Paulina's companion – he “offered [her] a handsome sum – thrice [her] present salary” (382 – her decision is informed by an astute recognition of Paulina's fundamental loyalty to men, specifically to her father and to Graham. Thus, although she “visited [Paulina] with pleasure” (383), these “visits soon taught [her] that it was unlikely even [her] occasional and voluntary society would long be indispensable to her” (383), because she anticipates Paulina's marriage to Graham. This closure in marriage seems to signify the victory of Victorian sensibility and order over the chaotic and fragmented narrative of Lucy's autobiography and its transgressive refusal to submit to the tyranny of compulsory heterosexuality. However, Lucy's description of the “happy truth” (532) of their marriage rings false because it relies on the cliché-ridden language of sentimental fiction that she ridicules and parodies elsewhere in her narrative. Biblical and religious references proliferate to substantiate the rightness of this particular union. Nevertheless, when Lucy's description of Paulina as a “sweet wife” who is the “corner stone” of her husband's “happiness” (532), is compared to her description of the vibrantly alive and loudly complaining Ginevra at novel's end, Lucy's real preference becomes quite obvious.

In this rebellious, “heretic narrative” (235) that challenges the canonical structures of desire, little Polly Home represents the ideal Victorian lady who lovingly embraces her function as the mediating force between men. Lucy, for instance, observes the enactment of this acquiescence and describes it as a picture, perhaps even signaling that what is represented here, resembles the four pictures of “*La vie d'une femme*” that she found so boring:

Paulina sat between the two gentlemen; while they conversed, her little hands were busy at some work; I thought at first she was binding a nosegay. No; with the tiny pair of scissors, glittering in her lap, she had severed spoils from each manly head beside her, and was now occupied in plaiting together the gray lock and the golden wave. The plait woven – no silk-thread being at hand to bind it – a tress of her own hair was made to serve that purpose; she tied it like a knot, prisoned it in a locket, and laid it on her heart. (531)

Polly's arrival at the Bretton house where the fourteen-year-old Lucy is visiting her godmother introduces the first triangular relationships that Lucy negotiates in her narrative. Her arrival changes Lucy's status and privileges as a single child at her godmother's home, because "one child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of, and in a quiet way [Lucy] was a good deal taken notice of by Mrs Bretton" (61). Polly, however, displaces Lucy in Mrs Bretton's affections, it seems, because her smallness elicits from Mrs Bretton, "not generally a caressing woman: not even with her deeply-cherished son, her manner was rarely sentimental" (64), an uncharacteristically affectionate response. It immediately relegates Lucy to the margins of the family circle where she is situated as a voyeur of Polly's interactions with other people, notably with Graham Bretton. This displacement is confirmed by Mrs Bretton's failure to tell Lucy that the child will share the room she considers her own.

Graham's arrival from school and his challenge to Polly – "Very good, Miss Home. I am going to be a favourite: preferred before papa soon. I dare say" (75) – initiates the triangular configuration that eventually situates Polly as the mediating influence between her father and her husband. Polly's intense attachment to her father clearly irritates Lucy who calls her "a little busy-body" (72). Her description of Polly's attempt to hem a handkerchief reveals the masochistic repression of emotion upon which the little girl's assumption of the feminine role is premised:

[S]he bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon – swerving

from her control – inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly. (73)

The equation of womanhood with self-inflicted pain endured in the service of the domestic, is in stark contrast to Mrs Bretton's description of Polly's mother who was "a very pretty, but a giddy, careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband" (62). This 'bad' mother, separated from her husband and daughter, dies as a result of over-exertion at a ball followed by fever. Mrs Bretton, who feels great pity for Mr Home, hopes that "the child will not be like her mama; as silly and frivolous a little flirt as ever a sensible man was weak enough to marry" (63). Even without the marker of domestic containment suggested by her surname, Home, it is obvious that Polly does not resemble her mother. Her obedient submission to the feminine role seems to suggest a self-conscious reaction against her rebellious mother in an attempt to counter the contaminating influence of this maternal genealogy.

If the mother is the daughter's original home, the daughter, in this case, distances herself from that place of origin and identifies, instead, with the father, whose name she carries. Since she so willingly becomes the obedient daughter of the father, she displaces the mother and becomes in her stead the place or home for a man and for the children she bears him. Unlike her mother who resisted the passivity of this containment not only within the marital home, but also within the maternal body as home, Polly accepts it wholeheartedly. Lucy draws attention to the discrepancies between this feminine passivity (that also causes profound anxiety because it makes women so dependent on men) and the freedom of movement enjoyed by men who are out in the world, not waiting but doing things:

How often, while women and girls sit warm at snug firesides, their hearts and imaginations are doomed to divorce from the comfort surrounding their persons, forced out by night to wander through dark ways, to dare stress of weather, to contend with the snow-blast, to wait at lonely grates and stiles in wildest storms, watching and listening to see and hear the father, the son, the husband coming home. (363)

Since Lucy is neither wife, daughter, sister nor mother she remains outside the structures that define women according to their relationships with men. This view of women as "relative creatures", to use Sarah Ellis' approving description of nineteenth-century British women (quoted in Basch 1974: 5), is, however, exemplified by Polly. Although she is entirely unlike Jane Eyre, who resists containment and passivity, a comparison between the two women illustrates the invidiousness of a system that denies women an independent subjectivity.

The Oedipal triangle from within which Jane writes situates her as a penetrated body, one marked by heterosexual desire as the maternal *place* in the text. Luce Irigaray argues that, "traditionally, in the role of mother, woman represents a sense of *place* for man," and is "also used as a kind of envelope by man in order to help him set limits to things" (1991: 169). As a result, the "mother woman . . . remains inseparable from the work or act of man, notably in so far as he defines her, and creates his own identity through her or, correlatively, through this determination of her being" (169). This inscription of identity is notable in Jane Eyre's movement away from Moore-House, a potential home shared with the Rivers sisters, to Ferndean, Rochester's property, where she becomes his wife and the mother of a son. Jane thus relinquishes her independent status that enables her to construct a home or place for herself, in favour of her becoming, herself, a place for Rochester and their son. This illustrates Irigaray's argument that "[t]he mother woman remains the *place separated from its 'own' place*, a place deprived of a place of its own. She ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it" (169, emphasis in original).

Jane's autobiographical narrative thus moves – one may even say, is compelled to move as a result of its obsession with origin and kinship – towards the construction of female identity as a "place of the other" (169) that serves as conduit for the transfer of power from father to son. This is signified by the birth of a son who "had inherited [Rochester's] own eyes, as they once were – large, brilliant and black" (Brontë 1987a: 457). Jane, prior to giving birth to a son, had been the blinded Rochester's "vision", "the apple of his eye", who found "pleasure" in "gazing for his behalf" (456). The gaze is, however, re-established

as phallic at closure when the power of penetrating vision, sight as metonymic marker of the phallus, is transferred from father to son through the body of the mother.

The precariousness of Jane's position here, writing her autobiography ten years after her marriage to Rochester, obviously recalls Bertha, who had been married to Rochester for ten years when Jane arrives at Thornfield. When looked at within the context set by Irigaray's analysis of woman as a "place of the other" (1991: 169), Jane's position seems to represent, at least potentially, a repetition of Bertha's fate. Irigaray argues that man, in "the endless construction of substitutes for his prenatal home . . . robs femininity of the tissue or texture of her spatiality" (170):

In exchange, though it never is one, he buys her a house, shuts her up in it, and places limits on her that are the counterpart of the place without limits where he unwittingly leaves her. He envelops her within these walls while he envelops himself and his things in her flesh. The nature of these envelopes is different in each case: on the one hand, they are invisibly alive, and yet have barely perceptible limits; and on the other hand, they offer a visible limit or shelter that risks imprisoning or murdering the other unless a door is left open. (170)

In *Villette*, Brontë renegotiates and expands the analysis of woman's place *in* the world and woman *as* place for the other that she introduces in *Jane Eyre*. In contrast to Jane, Lucy, who remains outside all the structures that define Jane's status as "a proper lady" (Smith 1993: 16), "contest[s] such roles and postures by pursuing her own desire and independence from men" (16). She does not assume any of the female cultural roles Jane does and, at the end of her narrative, is not defined by the "social roles concomitant with her biological destiny" (13): she is neither daughter, wife, widow nor mother.⁷ The definition of these roles is not only premised on a view of the body as a penetrable site, but more importantly, on the heterosexual imperative that the penetrated body is essentially gendered as female, whereas the penetrating body is male. Sidonie Smith suggests that the hymen is seen to be both the "material and symbolic boundary of the female body" and the "[b]order of both

integrity and violation defin[ing] an inside/outside boundary wholly other from that of the universal subject" (12). According to this definition, Lucy's status as a body, the integrity of which is maintained because a man never penetrates it, resembles that of the universal (male) subject far more than it does that of the female penetrated body. Yet, in Lucy's narrative, the notion of integrity is consistently destabilised because the act of penetration, figured as the penetrating gaze and penetration into private physical spaces, is not a male prerogative.

The most obvious metonym for Lucy's body as a penetrable site is the "l'allée défendue" (Brontë 1987b: 174) in the school garden that she claims as her own. "[F]orbidden" to pupils and "shunned" by teachers, the alley's "seclusion, the very gloom of the walk" (174), appeals to Lucy. She gradually claims this place, "by slow degrees" overcoming "the fear of seeming singular", and becomes "a frequenter of this strait and narrow path" (174). Rather than the overtly sexualised reading of this place as exclusively a metaphor for the female body, I read Lucy's efforts to clean the alley, and tend the flowers that grow there, as an expression of her desire to establish a private space, a symbolic room of her own, in which to situate herself as a body. Although this space is, of course, part of the larger garden and therefore easily accessible to anyone who chooses to go there, it nonetheless represents Lucy's transformation of a culturally inscribed internal boundary (hymen) into self-defined external boundaries that enlarge and exteriorise the penetrable space of the female body. Simply put, Lucy wants to take up more space. To do so, she redefines the inside/outside boundaries of her body: thus challenging the construction of sexual identity based on actual male penetration of the female body. The space surrounding the body is established as an extension of it, and penetration into that space signifies not only an expanded potential for violation, but also, for the experience of pleasure. On the one hand, this strategy attempts to create a space outside the body that serves as a kind of buffer absorbing intrusion before it reaches the body. On the other hand, the body saturates that space and therefore still *fee/s* the intrusion, whether as pleasure or as pain. Penetration is therefore not as assiduously resisted, because the exteriorisation of the boundaries signifying integrity facilitates greater tolerance

of intrusion, as if the extended bodily space provides a less contested site for the play of desire. The paradox at the heart of this strategy is, of course, that the body both is and is not implicated.

The fact that this place is in the garden of a girls' school does not preclude male penetration. The proximity of the "boys' college" (173), which is obviously the reason why the walk is "forbidden" (180) to pupils, hints at the possible dangers of penetration, and the resultant need to police the virginal bodies of the pupils. The "ghost story" of the young nun who was "buried alive [in the garden], for some sin against her vow" (172), is clearly used to keep the pupils away from the boundary that separates the two schools. Yet, Lucy, no less a virgin than the pupils and therefore no less at risk, rejects the story as "romantic rubbish" (173) and reclaims the space for herself regardless.

A significant illustration of how proximity is used to encourage and control desire occurs on the night of the fête ball when Madame Beck, whom Lucy describes as "a little Buonaparte in a mouse-coloured silk gown",

with her own personal surveillance – kept aloof at the remotest, drearest, coldest, darkest side of the carré – a small, forlorn, band of 'jeunes gens,' these being all of the best families, grown-up sons of mothers present, and whose sisters were pupils in the school. (213)

Lucy describes the "admission of these rattlesnakes, so fascinating and so dangerous," as a "bold stroke" ensuring the success of Madame Beck's fête because their presence furnished a most piquant ingredient to the entertainment: "the pupils knew it, and saw it, and the view of such golden apples shining afar off, animated them with a spirit no other circumstances could have kindled" (213). Madame Beck further consolidates her success because "the parents were made accomplices to the deed" (213).

It is obvious from Lucy's observations that the rule of male exclusion from the school relies on Madame Beck's discretion entirely. M. Paul is, for instance, the only man allowed to dance with the pupils at the ball, even though he is unmarried. Lucy explains this by referring to his "soul of honour" (212) and his stubborn refusal to be contradicted. However, it seems more likely that

he holds this privilege because he is related to Madame Beck, as Lucy at first suggests. He also teaches in her school and thus has access at all times. Madame Beck also allows Dr John/Graham Bretton into her school when her own (old and married) doctor is unavailable. At first, he only sees her own children, but when a pupil falls ill, he is allowed access to the school and garden. This nearly ruins Madame Beck's reputation, but with "her skilled management" (165) of the situation, "she came off with colours flying; people liked her as a directress better than ever" (166).

Both the men who are thus allowed entry into the school use this freedom to invade spaces that belong to Lucy. One night, Dr John "penetrated" to Lucy's "forbidden walk" (180) in quest of a letter that de Hamal, mistaking Lucy for Ginevra, had dropped into the garden. His intention is to protect Ginevra's reputation by retrieving the letter and he gains access to the garden because "he knew himself privileged" (180). Lucy, however, describes "the intrusion of a man into that spot, at that hour" as "sacrilege", and notes the destruction of Dr John's passage: "he was lost in the shrubs, trampling flowers and breaking branches" (180). Lucy experiences the double invasion – de Hamal's letter and Dr John's attempted retrieval of it – both as a violation of *her* space and as a contamination of the rest of the garden:

My alley, and, indeed, all the walks and shrubs in the garden, had acquired a new, but not pleasant interest; their seclusion was now become precarious; their calm – insecure. That casement which rained billets, had vulgarised the once dear nook it overlooked; and elsewhere the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears. (183)

It is because Madame Beck "caught an intimation of things extraordinary transpiring on her premises" (182), that Lucy's "once dear nook" becomes a place where even plants and trees are implicated in the "art of surveillance" at which Beck is so "[f]inely accomplished" (182). Yet, Lucy seems more amused than threatened by Beck's anticipated surveillance, "smiling as [she] lay awake and thoughtful" (182). She imagines that Beck sees "that night's transactions" as "a delicious little ravelled plot [that] lay tempting her to disentanglement; and

in the midst, folded round and round in cobwebs, has she not secured 'Meess Lucie,' clumsily involved, like the foolish fly she was?" (182) It is therefore not the "transactions" between herself and Dr John that interest Lucy as much as does Madame Beck's response to these events.

Lucy clearly dislikes being implicated in the type of "romantic rubbish" (173) that de Hamal's love letter and Dr John's retrieval of the letter represent. Here, and throughout her narrative, she refuses to represent her life according to the formulaic constructs of sentimental romantic fiction, self-consciously deflating and mocking her reader's expectations. For her, the entire situation is vulgar, and the fear of contamination motivates her to "efface very early in the morning" the signs of Dr John's "hasty and heedless progress," his "foot-marks . . . left on the beds" (183).⁸ Lucy's erasure of the signs of Dr John's presence coincides with the need to "prop up, water, and revive" the plants he had "trodden down" (183). As always, Lucy's motivations are complex, and although she is protecting both Ginevra and Dr John, this is not her only motivation. It is, of course, ironic that Lucy's space is penetrated because Dr John wants to protect Ginevra's reputation and forestall de Hamal's penetration of the space surrounding her. Lucy's space is not recognised as such because both de Hamal and Dr John, situated as they are as rivals in the erotic triangle with Ginevra, view the garden as Ginevra's space, imbued with her presence alone.

Lucy harbours no delusions about her role in this affair and hence she does not experience the destructive intrusion as a violation of her self. Her concern is rather with Madame Beck and the conclusions she may draw from Lucy's presence in the garden at night when there had obviously been some disturbance to draw her there. As I have suggested above, the primary relationship here is not with Dr John, or even Ginevra, but with Madame Beck, whose original approval of Lucy's presence in the forbidden alley – she had "smiled approbation" (174) and had "kindly recommended [Lucy] to confine [her]self to it as much as [she] chose" (175) – suggests trust and an understanding of Lucy's need for solitude.

Thus, when Lucy refuses to become Polly's companion, she immediately refers to Madame Beck as someone who understands her need for

independence: "Madame Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well. I was not *her* companion, nor her children's governess; she left me free: she tied me to nothing – not to herself – not even to her interests" (383, emphasis in original).

I have earlier suggested that Lucy's inability to speak is reconfigured within the context of performance, both as an actress in M. Paul's school play and also as a teacher in Madame Beck's school. Madame Beck's significance in Lucy's life, as the facilitator of her movement out of passivity as a nursery maid and into a career as a teacher, is evident. She challenges Lucy and compels her to decide for herself whether she is too weak to take the place of the English teacher, and Lucy is almost shamed into action:

I might have said 'Yes', and gone back to nursery obscurity, and there, perhaps mouldered for the rest of my life; but, looking up at Madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant, she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. . . . It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence – all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire. (141)

It is not surprising that Lucy's narrative participates in the ideology that defines forceful, ambitious women as masculine. However, Lucy does not necessarily judge this attribute as undesirable. Madame Beck, who is entirely financially independent and in charge of her own school, defies the model of dependence and passivity that Paulina fills in the text. In contrast to the homely Paulina, Madame Beck is a teacher whose "favourite study" is geography, which, Lucy tells her readers, "she taught well" (224). The older woman represents a far more appropriate role model for Lucy, who admires her – albeit somewhat grudgingly at times. Nina Auerbach suggests that in Lucy's "ascension to government [of her own school], at least, Madame Beck is her ally from first to last. It is she who snatches Lucy out of the 'nursery obscurity' of a woman's sphere and makes her look in the face of power" (1978: 110).

Although Lucy is frequently critical of Beck's surveillance and angered by her intrusiveness, she recognises and understands the motivations behind this

policing. What is more, she learns from Beck that self-control, and not repression, is an essential tool for survival in a society that deprives women of any real power. In this recognition of the value of a self-conscious assumption of disguise, Madame Beck resembles the Marquise de Merteuil in Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) who, in a letter to her lover, the Vicomte de Valmont, writes:

At my entrance into society I was still a girl, condemned by my status to silence and inaction, and I made the most of my opportunities to observe and reflect. I was thought scatter-brained and absent-minded: I paid little attention, in fact, to what everyone was anxious to tell me, but was careful to ponder what they attempted to hide.

This useful curiosity, while it increased my knowledge, taught me to dissemble. Since I was often obliged to conceal the objects of my attention from the eyes of those around me, I tried to be able to turn my own wherever I pleased; from that time I have been able at will to assume the air of detachment you have so often admired. Encouraged by my first success, I tried in the same way to control the different expressions on my face. When I felt annoyed I practiced looking serene, even cheerful; in my enthusiasm I went so far as to suffer pain voluntarily so as to achieve a simultaneous expression of pleasure. I laboured with the same care, and even more difficulty, to repress symptoms of unexpected joy. In this way I was able to acquire the power over my features at which I have sometimes seen you so astonished. (1977: 181)

In contrast to the self-exposure of Vashti's dramatic performance that challenges the taboo on the expression of female passion, the model of performance thus embodied by Madame Beck suggests not a repression of strong emotions, but their control in a conscious, rational, intelligent and directed manner. She does not submit to societal pressures, but instead assumes a costume of apparent conformity, which disguises the truly subversive nature of her power, which is achieved and maintained independent of men. Madame Beck thus presents Lucy with a model of self-control that is empowering, rather than debilitating. As a result, Lucy's inner conflicts are

resolved because she no longer has to conform to the standard of feminine meekness and passivity required by the economy of patriarchal marriage.

The relational model of female subjectivity is even more radically subverted by Lucy than by Madame Beck because, unlike Madame Beck who is still defined as a widow and a mother, Lucy escapes those definitions entirely. To illustrate her complete liberation from these roles, her narrative also consciously subverts the notion that origin explains or establishes identity. Whereas Jane Eyre's autobiography is driven by a desire for kinship, and the "I" she constructs for her reader, defined by and against her familial relationships, Lucy Snowe refuses to even acknowledge origin or family as in any way significant. In fact, she consistently excludes reference to family as if this would fix her in what Virginia Woolf describes as the "strangled individuality" (quoted in Smith 1993: 85) at the centre of the traditional Victorian autobiography. Instead, shipwreck as metaphor for origin is introduced. It runs through Lucy's narrative to emerge at crucial moments of rebirth, representing origin as a repetitive process and not the fixed basis for identity. The one stable aspect of identity for Lucy appears to be the way in which her metaphor constructs her as a survivor.

The first extended use of this metaphor occurs when Lucy's narrative has to account for the time lapse of "eight years" (Brontë 1987b: 94) between her stay with the Brettons and her stay with Miss Marchmont. The introduction of this metaphor coincides with the first of many challenges Lucy extends to her reader. These challenges draw attention to how mundane and predictable the reader's expectations, shaped by narrative conventions, are. Firstly, Lucy challenges the reader's "amiable conjecture" that she was "glad to return to the bosom of [her] kindred" because "it does no harm" and can therefore "be safely left uncontradicted" (94). However, it is obvious from Lucy's metaphor of herself as "a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass" (94) that she views her reader's expectations as unrealistic and sentimental. These expectations are also shown to be gender specific because this idyllic "[p]icture [of her] idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed by constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft" is how "[a] great many women and girls are *supposed* to pass their lives"

(94, emphasis added). The barely disguised ridicule she feels for such representations of women's lives is signaled by her sudden shift into an ironic deconstruction of her reader's expectations when she says:

However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been a wreck at last. I too well remember a time – a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (94)

Unlike the ideal *picture* of indolent womanhood constructed by sentimental romance, Lucy's *experience* attests to an unpredictable and violent universe which inscribes itself on the psyche, both in memory – "I too well remember" (94) – and in recurring nightmares. Her survival is always predicated on the loss of others, and the inevitability of loss enforces her constant self-admonishment for moderation in all things. Since her autobiography is written retrospectively, the final loss of Paul in a storm at sea must be seen to inform the metaphors of loss Lucy constructs to make sense of her life. However, loss also signifies change and new beginnings, and even the profound loss of M. Paul represents yet another point of origin for Lucy, who becomes an independent head mistress of her own school.

Writing about Brontë's insistence that Paul should die at the end of the novel, regardless of the wishes of her father, Elizabeth Gaskell describes how Brontë "could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating" (1985: 484). By refusing Lucy Snowe the closure in marriage that had been the destiny of her other female characters, Brontë may be seen to acknowledge, and rectify, the ambivalence that marks the closure of those novels. Her mimicry of the realist convention, which both accommodates and subverts its silencing of female desire, is finally discarded in *Villette*, where Lucy Snowe's narrative represents a radical departure from convention, the

most obvious of which is Paul's death. In a letter to George Smith, Brontë explains her decision, which she recognises "is not pleasant and it will probably be found unwelcome to the reader", as, however, "*compulsory upon the writer*" (quoted in Gérin 1969: 510, emphasis in original):

The spirit of romance would have indicated another course, far more flowery and inviting; it would have fashioned a paramount hero, kept faithfully to him, and made him supremely worshipful; he should have an idol, and not a mute, unresponding idol either; but this would have been unlike real life – inconsistent with truth – at variance with probability. (Quoted in Gérin 1969: 510)

Brontë justifies her decision by claiming the conventional standards of "real life" and "truth" as motivating forces, because M. Paul's death serves a far more subversive purpose than Brontë can acknowledge to her conservative publisher. However, Brontë's anxiety about the impact of marriage on the creative life of a woman writer, expressed in a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, perhaps more accurately explains the assiduity with which she maintains Lucy's unmarried status at novel's end. Although the letter is written after the publication of *Villette* (July 1853) and anticipates her marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls, its significance in relation to the novel resides in Brontë's view of marriage as potentially restrictive of artistic expression and the privacy, even isolation, it demands:

A thought comes to me. Do you . . . find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be quite *your own woman* . . . ? Don't answer the question; it is not intended to be answered. (Quoted in Gordon 1994: 293, emphasis in original)

Brontë's deviation from the conventional happy-ending ensures that Lucy Snowe remains "quite [her] own woman" because she does not marry. Paul's initial absence and eventual death serve a similar purpose in Lucy's life as does the absent or unattainable lover that is, as Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, chosen by the woman who fears being overpowered by the masculine subject: "By choosing someone who is not attainable, [a woman]

may make of love an abstract subjective experience with no threat to her integrity; she feels the emotions of longing, hope, bitterness, but without real entanglement" (quoted in Erkkila 1992: 66).

In Lucy's case, the years of M. Paul's absence represent "the three happiest years of [her] life" (Brontë 1987b: 593) because her school flourishes and, even though she "worked hard" (594), she also achieves a sense of peace and tranquility. She ascribes the "secret of [her] success" to "a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart" (594) brought about by M. Paul's love for her and the "legacy" he leaves her. M. Paul does indeed serve an enabling purpose in Lucy's life by making the school available to her, but it is the actual management of her own school, and the financial independence this establishes for her, that changes her into a much stronger, more secure woman. This sense of stability is expressed when she describes her state of mind at this point: "Few things shook me now; few things had importance to vex, intimidate, or depress me: most things pleased – mere trifles had a charm" (594). Yet, it is also important for Lucy to frame her "success" (594) with reference to M. Paul's contribution. She describes herself as "the steward of his property" who is "determined . . . to render a good account" (593). She thus situates herself in the very traditional role of wife, which she, of course, is not. In fact, M. Paul's establishment of Lucy in her own school mimics the traditional features of marriage in which a married woman is placed within the house owned by her husband. However, Lucy explicitly points out that M. Paul does not own the house and "is hardly the man to become a proprietor" (589). Lucy also does not own the property but rents it. The notion of ownership is thus subverted at the same time as the location of the married woman within the house of her husband is contradicted by Lucy's status as a single woman who manages her own school for girls.

Nina Auerbach, for instance, argues that "we need not trust Lucy's own hyperbole when she dubs [M. Paul] her king and the arbiter of her destiny" (1978: 112). She suggests, instead, that it is "only Madame Beck's insistent example [that] enables her to govern there successfully" (112). Auerbach's argument foregrounds the subversive nature of Lucy's position at the end of her narrative: "In fact, as seen through Lucy's eyes, the end of the novel can be

regarded as a triumph of decent and orderly deviousness" (112). Lucy's escape from enclosure within the plot of the Victorian novel is managed successfully because she refuses to conform to its representation of desire as linear, singular and, above all, masculine. Instead of entrapment within a man's house as his wife and the mother of his children as the nineteenth-century novel would situate her, Lucy's project is to construct "a habitation that does not contain or imprison [women]" (Irigaray quoted in Whitford 1991: 47).

Villette therefore represents a far more revolutionary break with both the content and the structure of the Victorian novel than is found in Brontë's other novels. In it, she creates a female first-person narrator who refuses to fix herself and others in the narrow gaze of male mastery or to inscribe sexuality in the rigid formulations of the master language. Irigaray argues that

men continually seek, construct, create for themselves houses everywhere: grottoes, huts, women, towns, language [langage], concepts, theory, etc.; so women too need a house of language: they need language, a language. That house of language [langue] which for man even constitutes a substitute for his home in a body . . . woman is used to construct it but (as a result?) it is not available to her. (Irigaray quoted in Whitford 1991: 43)

Lucy attempts to find a language that can adequately express the multiplicity of female desire and to create a textual house of language that does not enclose women within the house of compulsory heterosexuality and domesticity. Karen Lawrence suggests, for example, that "*Villette* stages the necessity of a voyage out of the domestic novel" because only "in her voyage out from England" does Lucy discover "a new language of passion in which to inscribe her own desire" (1994: 27).

The articulation of female desire within the narrow confines of the nineteenth-century novel preoccupies Brontë in all her novels, but in *Villette* the far more radical possibility of female homosociality as sexual desire tries to find expression. In varying and subtle ways Lucy's narrative seeks to explain this transgressive desire, which refuses to conform to the paradigm of male

homosocial desire represented by the relationship between Crimsworth and Hunsden in *The Professor*. Instead, there is the puzzle of an other desire:

I don't know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel, as sometimes happened – for instance when we took a long walk into the country, and halted for refreshment at a farm – I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather like to let her take the lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk: so it was, however, and she knew it; and, therefore, while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated. (Brontë 1987b: 312 – 3)

Is *Villette* therefore a lesbian text? The category itself is a contested one as debates around it have shown. I am also hesitant to fix a novel that so insistently resists the limitations of categories with one that will most likely contradict this resistance. However, Terry Castle's analysis of Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel, *Summer Will Show*, and her definition of it as "lesbian fiction" (1997: 548) suggests a paradigm which allows for a reading of *Villette* as at least partly a lesbian fiction:

But most important, by plotting against what Eve Sedgwick has called the 'plot of male homosociality', the archetypal lesbian fiction decanonises, so to speak, the canonical structure of desire itself. Insofar as it documents a world in which men are 'between women' rather than vice versa, it is an insult to the conventional geometries of fictional eros. It dismantles the real, as it were, in a search for the not-yet-real, something unpredicted and unpredictable. It is an assault on the banal: a retriangulation of triangles. As a consequence, it often looks odd, fantastical, implausible. (1997: 548)

Villette clearly "documents a world in which men are 'between women'" (548) and it thus reconfigures the canonical triangular configuration of male homosocial desire. However, Lucy Snowe's narrative does not simply invert the traditional paradigm. It represents a far more radical challenge to the structure and content of the Victorian realist novel, because it succeeds in

creating a truly subversive female narrative voice to articulate the multiplicity of female desire, which is rooted in female homosocial relationships and includes lesbian desire.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ Brontë had, on an earlier occasion, taken Thackeray to task for exactly this conflation of herself with her characters when he had introduced her to his mother as “Jane Eyre” at one of his public lectures, which Brontë, who was visiting London at the time (1851), attended. Even though she did not show her anger then and there, Brontë confronted Thackeray the next morning when he visited her. In his memoir, George Smith, Brontë’s publisher, describes the scene with Thackeray

standing on the hearth-rug looking anything but happy. Charlotte Brontë stood close to him, with head thrown back and her face white. The first words I heard were “No, Sir! If *you* had come to our part of the country in Yorkshire, what would you have thought of me if I had introduced you to my father, before a mixed company of strangers, as ‘Mr Warrington’?” Thackeray replied, ‘No, you mean Arthur Pendennis.’ ‘No, I *don’t* mean Arthur Pendennis – I mean Mr. Warrington, and Mr. Warrington would not have behaved as you behaved to me yesterday.’ The spectacle of this little woman, *hardly reaching* to Thackeray’s elbow, but, somehow, looking stronger and fiercer than himself . . . resembled the dropping of shells into a fortress (quoted in Gérin 1969: 477).

² As I have suggested in Chapter 1, Brontë herself identified with the “masculine George Sand” (Wise and Symington 1932: II 180) and would, no doubt, have been pleased with Eliot’s comparison.

³ Eliot’s physical appearance seems to have reassured George Smith’s wife who, initially, “questioned her husband’s frequent visits to another woman to whom she was not introduced” (Gordon 1994: 325). Seeing Eliot at the opera one night, however, she “contemplat[ed] the writer’s tired, broad, melancholy face, she assured her husband brightly that he was free to see that woman every day of the week” (325). Emily Dickinson, who greatly admired Eliot – both as woman and writer – also, though far more sympathetically of course, commented on Eliot’s appearance when she wrote of “the Face of George Eliot”: “God chooses repellent settings, don’t he, for his best Gems” (quoted in Erkkilä 1992: 62). A portrait of Eliot hung in Dickinson’s room.

⁴ The autobiographical voice that emerges here resembles that of the speaker in Sylvia Plath’s “Elm” far more than it does the voice traditionally associated with nineteenth-century woman in the realist novel. The following extract from “Elm” illustrates the resemblance:

I am inhabited by a cry.
Nightly it flaps out
Looking, with its hooks, for something to love.

I am terrified by this dark thing
That sleeps in me;
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity.
(1983: 26)

⁵ See, for instance, the unattributed painting of St Lucy in C. G. Jung’s *Man and his Symbols* (1979: 120).

⁶ Virginia Woolf of course argues that “killing the Angel in the House” is “part of the occupation of the woman writer” (1995:5).

⁷ Nina Auerbach sees Lucy's single status as central to the way in which female community is represented in the *Villette*. In her analysis of the representation of female communities in Gaskell's *Cranford* and in Brontë's *Villette*, she argues that both novels "depict communities of women that have moved from the sphere of household management into that of government" (1978: 77):

Villette is uncompromising in its divorce between the family and the state, it is also a welcome departure from the Victorian cant that justified woman's work only by making it a natural outgrowth of familiar duties. In its denial that motherhood and government are the same thing, as in its heroine's ability to love two men at the same time, *Villette* forces on the reader facets of women not covered by the traditional definition of daughter, mother, wife. By virtue of its very detachment from household management, the pensionnat becomes a little state, the government of which is government itself. (105)

⁸ Dr John/Graham Bretton's thoughtless destruction of the plants recalls the profoundly disturbing description of his treatment of Polly on the night when she hears she has to return to her father, observed, of course, by Lucy:

'Little Mousie' crept to his side, and lay down on the carpet at his feet, her face to the floor; mute and motionless she kept that post and position till bed-time. Once I saw Graham – wholly unconscious of her proximity – push her with his restless foot. She receded an inch or two. A minute after one little hand stole out from beneath her face, to which it had been pressed, and softly caressed the heedless foot. (Brontë 1987b: 90)

Conclusion

In my exploration of the representation of female homosocial relationships in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, I have argued that the structure of the Victorian realist novel, particularly its plotting towards the containment and silencing of female desire in heterosexual marriage, constitutes an ideological inscription of patriarchal structures of control. Since closure in marriage signifies a structural confirmation of the existing social order, it also confirms patriarchy as a social, political and economic system, which promotes and strengthens male homosocial bonds to consolidate male power. Simultaneously, this system, because it enshrines heterosexual marriage as the culminating point in a woman's life, situates women as hostile rivals in the quest for a husband. The Victorian novel therefore represents female homosocial relationships as either based on rivalry or as simply insignificant. The bonds between women are always represented as secondary and inferior to the more important relationship established through the marriage-plot.

Brontë's novels reveal the underlying anxiety about female sexuality and desire that informs this representation of female homosocial relationships in the male authored/narrated Victorian realist novel. In an increasingly complex process of rewriting the Victorian novel from a female perspective, alternative plots that privilege the representation of female homosocial relationships, even as they imitate the conventional plot structure, are constructed. Also, Brontë's gendering of narrative voice as female lays claim to a female discourse of desire, which is rooted in female homosociality and which is also inclusive of lesbian desire. Compulsory (female) heterosexuality, which is exclusively domestic and maternal, is therefore challenged by an alternative representation of female desire that is both fluid and multiple in its expression.

Like Virginia Woolf, who proposes a literary genealogy of women, Brontë recuperates the mother-daughter relationship as a female homosocial paradigm for women writers and relates it explicitly to the representation of women's friendships in the nineteenth-century novel. In *Shirley*, for instance, the mother-daughter plot that is introduced coincides with a fledgling plot of female friendship. However, whereas the mother-daughter plot survives the eventual

victory of conventional closure in marriage, the friendship between Caroline and Shirley disappears as their voices are silenced at the end of the novel. In *Shirley*, I have argued that Brontë reveals how the Victorian novel, because of its privileging of heterosexual marriage, reinforces male homosocial bonds while also displacing the bonds between women. The potential for an Other desire (such as Woolf proposes in *A Room of One's Own* and even more so in *Orlando*) persistently asserts itself, but is never completely established because it cannot, Brontë suggests, survive the confines of marriage.

This potential also asserts itself in *Jane Eyre*, because the outspoken narrator/autobiographer grasps narrative voice to tell her story and the stories of other women. Thus, even though the novel appears to be entirely preoccupied with the construction of a plot that privileges heterosexual desire, its main concern is really with the shaping influence of Jane's relationships with other women. An alternative plot of sisterhood and female community is, for instance, introduced when Jane meets the Rivers sisters, but it collapses as a counter-plot because of St John's divisive influence. Jane's relationship with Mary Ann Wilson also signals the truly subversive potential inherent in female homosocial desire. As I have shown, however, Jane's narrative must construct it as a brief failure of judgement in order to contradict the transgressive pleasure the relationship represents.

Finally, in *Villette*, a complex and subtle analysis of the intricacies of female desire completely eliminates the structural inscription of heterosexual marriage at closure. The novel presents, instead, a plot structure that challenges notions of fixed sexual identity, because the imposition of gender is complicated by a self-conscious assumption of costume. The construction of gender is frequently shown to be a form of performance in *Villette*. Lucy Snowe's narrative is therefore also profoundly concerned with the act of looking, as well as with what it means to be the one looked at.

Beginning with an exploration of male homosocial desire in *The Professor*, Brontë's novels represent a consistent engagement with the relationship between patriarchal structures of control and the representation of female homosocial desire in the Victorian novel. In *Shirley*, the mother-daughter bond is not displaced by Caroline Helstone's marriage to Robert

Moore, but the friendship between Caroline and Shirley Keeldar is, however, completely displaced by the (doubled) plot of heterosexual marriage. The woman-centred autobiographical narrative of *Jane Eyre* foregrounds the potential of female homosocial desire to destabilise the structure of the nineteenth-century novel, but Jane must write from within the enclosure of patriarchal marriage to establish her moral authority as a female autobiographer. It is only in *Villette*, however, that the representation of female homosocial desire finally openly and successfully challenges the plot structure of Victorian realism.

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